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SHAKESPEARE ON THE PUPPET STAGE
THE REPRESENTATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND LIMITS OF ADAPTATION IN THE
CONTEMPORARY PUPPET THEATER

SHAKESPEARE A BÁBSZÍNPADON
AZ ADAPTÁCIÓ REPRESENTÁCIÓS LEHETŐSÉGEI ÉS KORLÁTAI A KORTÁRS
BÁBSZÍNHÁZBAN

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Introduction

Exemplifying the success of Shakespearean adaptations to the puppet stage, the final four International Adult Puppet Festivals in Pécs, Hungary¹ were all about Shakespeare: in 2010 an adaptation of *Othello* by Hungarian company Stúdió-K received a prize; in 2007 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the Budapest Puppet Theater drew great attention; the grand prize in 2004 was taken by *Macbeth*, performed by the Puppet Theater of Grodno, Belarus, while at the previous festival in 2001, two performances of *Hamlet* (one by the State Puppet Theater of Plovdiv, Bulgaria, the other by Figurentheater Wilde&Vogel from Germany) and Czech Divadlo Drak's *Romeo and Juliet* were the most celebrated pieces. Owing to much research and careful selection on the part of the organizers, the festival in Pécs had managed to present a collection of some of the best examples of Shakespeare on the puppet stage, and may have thus repeatedly given an impression of a profusion of such performances. This impression would have been false, however, as puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare were, in fact, just as scarce five, ten or fifteen years ago as they are today.

If one were to decide to see such a performance in Hungary today, (s)he would likely find no more than a single running production.² One would have to travel far and wide to see anything else – (s)he could buy tickets for *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* (by The Little Angel Theatre, the latter as a co-production with the Royal Shakespeare Company) as well as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (by Bristol Old Vic and Handspring Puppet Company) in London; *Romeo and Juliet* in Bucharest (by Tandarica Theater) as well as in Madrid (by Compañía Albero Teatro) and in Cali, Colombia (by Teatro Esquina Latina); and, if very lucky, may still catch an adaptation of *Hamlet* by Wilde&Vogel in Stuttgart, Germany³. The scarcity of such performances is further demonstrated by the fact that in the last decade, professional Hungarian puppet theaters and companies have brought but a handful of adaptations of Shakespeare to national or international puppet festivals: *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Budapest Puppet Theater - 2000, 2006), *Hamlet* (Kolibri Theater - 2001),

¹ The festival was discontinued after 2010 due to a lack of funds.

² At the time of writing, the only running production of a puppet theater adaptation of Shakespeare is *Romeo and Juliet*, performed by Harlekin Puppet Theater, Eger (a production aimed at teenage audiences).

³ The list is obviously incomplete. There may be dozens of productions on show all over the world, however, very few of them are accessible to an international audience. Searching for such performances on the World Wide Web, in online and printed puppet theater directories or even through personal inquiries within the community of puppeteers yields very few results. Moreover, a large percentage of the performances one may find are adaptations for children, based on *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb (these, although undoubtedly interesting, not being the object of the present dissertation) rather than performances for adults based on Shakespeare's plays.

Twelfth Night (Vaskakas Puppet Theater - 2002), *Macbeth* (Márkus Theater - 2003), *King Lear* (Atlantis Company - 2004), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Kolibri Theater – 2009) and *Romeo and Juliet* (Harlekin Puppet Theater, Eger - 2012) being among the most noteworthy.

The relevance of examining puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare, then, is justified not by the abundance of such performances but rather by the critical acclaim they almost invariably received and receive.⁴ The fact that Shakespeare's plays can function remarkably well in a medium not primarily based on speech, but rather on design and movement (one of the most fundamental arguments of this dissertation) calls for an examination of why this should be so, especially in today's critical universe where the emphasis on the mediality of representation is growing continuously. The principal aim of the present investigation, therefore, is to show how the puppet theater is able to present Shakespeare. As it will be pointed out, a *Romeo and Juliet* or a *Hamlet* cannot function in the puppet theater by simply substituting the actors with puppets. The puppet theater requires a different theatrical idiom with unique tools, methods and modes of representation, all of which will be analyzed on the basis of the applicable and relevant semiotic critical apparatus, within the framework of adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. I maintain that this critical and interpretive perspective of the dramatic theater – puppet theater interaction will not only shed light on the logic of representation upon which the opportunities of Shakespearean puppetry are based, but it can also make an important contribution to the understanding of the Shakespearean canon and the extraordinary survival capacity of the dramatic texts I will scrutinize.

The analysis will proceed as follows. Firstly, in Chapter 1 I will define and contextualize the term most frequently used in my discussion: *adaptation*. I will show how *adaptation* differs from other expressions in circulation and then establish how and why, in the specific framework of puppet theater performances of Shakespearean plays as discussed in the present dissertation, the word *adaptation*, more than any other term, is suitable for denoting the process and product of staging. This will be accomplished by critically assessing a number of definitions that scholars have established and subsequently arguing for a definition that incorporates the elements required in my framework. More specifically, I am going to argue that when undertaking an adaptation of a Shakespearean play to the puppet stage, one must (1) look for and find those elements of the drama which make it relevant for our time and social environment and which can lead us to a new direction for presenting the

⁴ All of the productions mentioned in this introduction have appeared on the international festival scene and nearly all of them have received national and international awards.

play; (2) define and follow this newfound direction which differs but also stems from the traditions that take us back to the 'original' and its origins, in order to produce a creative interpretation of the play; and (3) in following this direction transform, reduce and emend the play, within the limits of recognizability, to render it suitable for the medium of the puppet theater.

After having provided an acceptable working definition of *adaptation*, in Chapter 2 I am going to argue that the puppet theater is a genre independent of stage acting. In order to substantiate this hypothesis, I will closely examine two productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, one presented by human actors and one on the puppet stage. More specifically, I am going to claim that the puppet is perceived by the audience both as an inanimate object and a living creature at the same time. As will be shown, while actors can never fully separate themselves from the physical reality of having life, the puppet, being perceived as both an object with life and a symbolic representation of life, can present something both different and more than what live actors can achieve. From the essential difference between being *perceived as having life* or *actually having life*, it follows that the aesthetics of the puppet cannot be established on imitating the live theater but should be based on the qualities that distinguish the puppet from the actor. This theoretical consideration will bear particular relevance upon my argumentation since Shakespearean theatre and the dramas of his age were often preoccupied with representational problems, such as the difference between appearances and reality, show and substance, living and dead. Early modern drama systematically foregrounded these questions, and it is these semiotic problems, which the puppet theatre can also so efficiently address.

After explaining the independence of puppetry as a genre, and thereby providing the cross-generic aspect of adaptations, in Chapter 3 I am going to discuss how puppetry as a genre is capable of adapting verbal material into non-verbal content. In attempting to do so, I will examine two productions of *Hamlet*, one nearly and the other completely nonverbal. Through the analysis of these two performances, I aim to show how puppetry, owing to its unique methods of communication and especially to its ability to express complex notions without the use of speech, is capable of providing a new medium for a new interpretation, and thus throwing light on the very question of mediality of representation.

While in Chapters 2 and 3, due to the obvious limitations of information about the *process of adaptation* in the specific instances, the focus of attention is on *adaptation as a product*, in Chapter 4 I am going to further the argument to incorporate the process element into the examination of a fully non-verbal, string marionette adaptation of *Hamlet*. The chapter, while providing a detailed analysis of my own adaptation of the play, will also offer

an insight into the process of creating such an adaptation. This dual aim will be achieved by considering the three related issues raised when defining the term *adaptation* above; in effect, I am going to examine the ways in which adapting the play I (1) looked for and found those elements of the drama which make it relevant for our time and social environment and which can lead us to a new direction for presenting the play; (2) defined and followed this newfound direction in order to produce a creative interpretation of the play and; (3) in following this direction transformed, reduced and emended the play to render it suitable for the medium of the puppet theater. I will also reflect on the success of using an array of tools from the repertoire of the puppet theater to convey both the Shakespearean text and the complex phenomenon of the ‘Shakespearean play’.

After the treatment of the possibilities as well as the specific difficulties of staging Shakespeare in the puppet theater, Chapter 5 will focus on those elements of the plays that lend themselves most readily to the tools of puppetry. Through the analysis of two scenes from two Shakespeare plays, I am going to point out how the differences in the constituents in tragedies and comedies affect the possibilities of a puppet theater adaptation. The discussion will then take a very practical point of view and provide further insight into the creation of a performance for the puppet stage. As a synthesis of the findings of the previous four chapters I will consider the creative aspect of the process of adaptation; provide further examples of playing on the tension created by the duality of the “object with life”⁵; present additional techniques for translating the dramatic text for a nonverbal medium, and suggest a performance that focuses on those elements of the Shakespearean oeuvre that are most manageable by and thus, most rewarding for the puppet stage.

In the final chapter I will take a step away from the practical questions of puppet adaptations and broaden the focus of my investigation to show how the tools of puppetry may be applied not only on the live stage and on the puppet stage, but also in one of the puppet theater’s closest sister arts, the cinema. I will point out an array of important parallels between the two genres by first providing an example of each technique of puppetry and then showing how *Prospero’s Books*, a cinematic adaptation of *The Tempest* by Peter Greenaway, employs these techniques. The investigation of the tools of puppetry outside their usual context will serve to further demonstrate that, while puppetry creates its own interpretations of Shakespeare’s plays with its unique methods, it can also inspire other genres to employ the specific tools of the puppet theater in their Shakespearean adaptations.

⁵ Steve Tillis, *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet* (London: Greenwood Press, 1992), 65.

The themes the dissertation examines are on the borderland of adaptation theory, theater semiotics and puppet theater studies. My position as a practicing puppeteer allows for a unique perspective in all three areas, and I aim to introduce this perspective in order to show how practical implications of creating an adaptation may shed new light on the established views of Shakespearean representation, views that traditionally have not incorporated the possibilities inherent in puppet theater adaptations. However, as it is my firm belief that theory and practice can and should serve one another, I will not only reflect upon the ways in which practical experience may contribute to the critical discourse, but also aim to show, in Chapters 4 and 5, how a theoretical framework based in adaptation studies and semiotics can aid the creative process of staging Shakespeare.

Chapter 1. Defining *Adaptation*

In this chapter I will define and contextualize the term most frequently used in this dissertation: *adaptation*. First, I will show how *adaptation* differs from other expressions in circulation and then establish how and why, in the specific framework of puppet theater performances of Shakespearean plays, the word *adaptation*, more than any other term, is suitable in the perspective of the present dissertation for denoting the process and product of staging Shakespeare in the puppet theater.

Although there has been considerable scholarship on adaptations of dramatic texts to the live stage or to the film screen (both to be discussed in detail), both the specific genre of puppet theater adaptations of dramatic pieces and the cross-genre adaptation between the live and puppet stage have received comparatively little critical attention, a fact even more interesting given the amount of overlap between the audiences, tool repertoire and purpose of the two genres. In addition, the fact that many of the adaptations discussed in this dissertation are not only performances that cross the boundaries of genres, but also adaptations that traverse symbolic systems by translating emphatically verbal information⁶ into nonverbal information (cf. the idea of intersemiotic translation as explained by Jakobson⁷) calls for a working definition of adaptation which accounts for the ways in which a puppet theater performance not based on speech, or possibly completely devoid of text, can still be claimed to be an *adaptation* of a Shakespearean play. Finally, since my investigation focuses not only on the final result, but also on the very methods of creating puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare, a definition of adaptation encompassing both the process and the product of staging a play will be necessary.

‘Adaptation studies’ is a widely researched subject, central to literary theory, cinematography and theater studies, and definitions of the term *adaptation* abound.

⁶ Cf. the expression ‘to hear a play’ in *Hamlet* (2.2.561) and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (5.1.80). All Shakespeare quotations are taken from the following edition: William Shakespeare. *The Complete Works*. The Oxford Shakespeare, ed. W. J. Craig. London, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1911.

⁷ According to Roman Jakobson, “we distinguish three ways of interpreting a verbal sign: it may be translated into other signs of the same language, into another language, or into another, nonverbal system of symbols. These three kinds of translation are to be differently labeled: (1) Intralingual translation or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language; (2) Interlingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; (3) Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.” (Roman Jakobson. *On linguistic aspects of translation*. In: L. Venuti (ed.), *The translation studies reader* 113-118. London, United Kingdom: Routledge. [Reprinted from *On translation*, pp. 232-239, by R. Brower, Ed., 1959, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000]). It is important to note that I will be using the term ‘translation’ in this third sense of the word, since it is precisely the “interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” that I am referring to when I speak of the translation of a written text to the nonverbal sign system of puppetry.

Adaptation is a term that is all too often, and all too lightly replaced by a number of other labels, such as ‘version’, ‘rearrangement’, ‘reworking’ or ‘edition’, although all of these expressions clearly refer to quite different processes that may be part of but are not equivalent to *adaptation*. At the same time, *adaptation* is also subject to overgeneralization, commonly applied to mean anything from reproduction through alteration to loose association, and as such, it seems too vague a term to use without explaining *how* it is used and *why* it is used as opposed to anything else. Thus, in the following, by providing an overview of those definitions that bring us closer to the sense of the word in which it is used here, I will also try to answer why this particular term is more appropriate for my purposes than any other label. The final goal of this discussion will be to provide a definition, as well as an explanation of the *process* as well as the *product of adaptation* as it is used in the context of staging Shakespeare in the puppet theater.

1.1. *Adaptation*: an overview of definitions

Adaptation in arts is an act by which material of one medium is transformed according to the needs and rules of another medium. Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Adaptation* writes, “When we call a work adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works”.⁸ This is an important part of how *adaptation* is understood in this dissertation, as I will always use it in reference to a performance or film that declares its relationship to its source text. Hutcheon also says, “Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication”.⁹ This is again characteristic of the way the expression will be employed here, as it is never used in reference to the copying or imitation of an existing play but rather the repetition of its central themes. Hutcheon goes on to define *adaptation* as “an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works” as well as “a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging”.¹⁰ Recognizability and creative interpretation are chief components of any successful adaptation of Shakespeare, another reason why *adaptation* is indeed an appropriate term to define the performances analyzed here. Hutcheon argues that *adaptation* is also useful because there is no better expression in circulation to denote both “the process and the product”¹¹ (*adaptation* as both verb and noun) and asserts that other expressions in use (e.g., reworking, transformation, or appropriation) are either too restrictive or not specific

⁸ Linda Hutcheon. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2006. 6.

⁹ Hutcheon 7.

¹⁰ Hutcheon 8.

¹¹ Hutcheon 7.

enough. This reference to both the process and the product will be one of the most defining characteristics of the way *adaptation* is employed in the following chapters.

Even with accepting the wide applicability of *adaptation*, however, other scholars have tried introducing alternative terms to distinguish between different methods of reworking original¹² materials. Ruby Cohn, in *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots* mentions “abridgement”, “transformation”, “version” and “emendation”, among others, as possible substitutes for adaptation, but explains that none of these are exactly the same, as

a ‘reduction/emendation’ sees lines and words cut or altered, an ‘adaptation’ involves the addition of new material alongside substantial cutting and rearrangement, while a ‘transformation’, the most extreme mode of innovation, offers characters simplified or trundled through new events, with the ending scrapped.¹³

She finally contends that the best possible label for such a work is ‘offshoot’, because it incorporates all of the above. However, even in her foreword, she writes: “Shakespeare offshoots are not Shakespeare,”¹⁴ and thus, it is her own definition which disqualifies ‘offshoot’ as an appropriate substitute for *adaptation* in the current discussion. As I will argue, the performances analyzed in this paper, while being new works, can in fact represent instances of their Shakespearean original (*original* as defined above), and in this sense, they are not ‘offshoots’, but ‘Shakespearean adaptations.’

Julie Sanders in *Adaptation and Appropriation* allows that *adaptation* is a useful term to a certain point, but suggests that those interpretations in which the proclamation of

¹² The question of originality is a highly contentious issue, one to be dealt with in detail throughout the following chapters. In general, it can be stated that today we tend to look at adaptations as original creations in their own right. Roland Barthes in *The Death of the Author* (in: *Image-Music-Text* by Roland Barthes. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978. 143) argues that the text becomes separated from the author in a way that the author can no longer be considered the source of meaning of a text, nor can he be considered the authority on how a text must be interpreted. Today most authors suggest viewing adaptations as *intertexts* to the literary texts or as works based on a *performance text* rather than a *dramatic text* (see Keir Elam: *Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. London and NY: Taylor & Francis, 2002. 187-224, Patrice Pavis: *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*. NY: Taylor & Francis. 2005. 2-29 or in the specific case of puppet theater adaptations the introduction of Penny Francis: *Puppetry – a Reader in Theatre Practice* 5-24, for example). After Barthes there should be no point in speaking about an “original” nor should there be any need to address the seemingly outdated expectation of ‘fidelity to an original’. The fact is, however, that even though, as Julie Sanders in *Adaptation and Appropriation* (New York: Routledge, 2006. 46-47) and Jan Kott in *Recycling Shakespeare* (by Charles Marowitz, New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1991. 110) point out, most of Shakespeare’s own work can hardly be considered as original, there is still a very palpable expectation from many critics and directors today of being faithful to an ideal of “the original” when it comes to adapting Shakespeare’s plays. The reasons why the question arises in the case of Shakespeare more often than it does in connection with most other authors will be addressed later in this chapter. The word *original* in the current discussion is employed to refer to the *dramatic text* (as opposed to the *performance text*) of a play, the authenticity of which is still questionable (seeing that there may be different textual versions of a single play). *Original* will refer to a written text that creators of the theater can take as a starting point for producing their own performance text.

¹³ Ruby Cohn. *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976. 4.

¹⁴ Cohn vii.

independence is stronger than the demonstration of the ties to their source should be called *appropriations*. She suggests respective definitions of the two approaches as follows:

An adaptation signals a relationship with an informing source text or original; a cinematic version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for example, although clearly reinterpreted by the collaborative efforts of director, scriptwriter, actors, and the generic demands of the movement from stage drama to film, remains ostensibly *Hamlet* [...] On the other hand, appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain. This may or may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another.¹⁵

Such a distinction is useful so long as it is always possible to precisely assess the extent to which a given performance breaks away from its source text. Sanders herself admits, however, that it is frequently impossible to find the exact line separating an adaptation and an appropriation, and reverts to using the term adaptation in these questionable cases.

Fischlin and Fortier in *Adaptations of Shakespeare* also talk about 'appropriation' as an alternative for those adaptations that are less strongly connected to their source text. However, they observe that "this word suggests a hostile takeover, a seizure of authority over the original"¹⁶ and thereby carries an unwanted negative connotation. They also allow for the possibility that appropriation can, in theory, take place without any alteration of the original itself and conclude that "as such, appropriation is not the idea we need".¹⁷ They suggest an alternative term by introducing the phenomenon of 'reworking' to describe the process of modernizing Shakespeare's plays for contemporary audiences, but then arrive at the conclusion that 'reworking' can involve neither radical rewritings, nor a range of extreme directorial and theatrical practices, which are clearly incorporated in the meaning of 'adaptation'.¹⁸ Fischlin and Fortier comment that "adaptation implies a process rather than a beginning or an end, and as ongoing objects of adaptation all Shakespeare's plays remain in process", and because of this the word *adaptation* is most useful when referring to reworking, recontextualizing and reinterpreting Shakespeare. Their final argument for using *adaptation* as opposed to anything else is based on the fact that it is used more widely than any other expression. Although the argument may seem circular, the fact is that forcing the use of a new expression in the adaptation studies discourse would only lead to more misunderstanding. They acknowledge that "to fall back on adaptation as the working label is to take advantage of

¹⁵ Sanders 27.

¹⁶ Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, ed. *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*. London: Routledge, 2000. 3.

¹⁷ Fischlin and Fortier 3.

¹⁸ Fischlin and Fortier 3.

its general currency. It is the word in most common usage and therefore capable of minimizing confusion”.¹⁹

Margaret Jane Kidnie in *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* contests this conclusion and argues that an overly general use of the word “collapses adaptation into production” and thereby “neglects a crucial feature of the phenomenon - precisely the widespread critical ability to discriminate between Shakespeare and Shakespearean adaptation”.²⁰ She, however, also says that “it is impossible [...] to determine with certainty when a particular textual or theatrical instance is no longer a genuine instance of the work”²¹, and thus, continues to use the term *adaptation* for lack of anything more precise or more comprehensive for her own purposes.

Most authors who agree on employing *adaptation* as the dominant term in the discourse only show differences in how wide a scope they are willing to allow in the use of the word, and thus, can be grouped along an imaginary scale of ever narrowing definitions. Some, like Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer, editors of *Shakespeare and Appropriation*²² and Tony Howard in *Shakespeare’s cinematic offshoots*,²³ for instance, place allusions, emendations, appropriations, variations, remakes and parodies, among others, all into the broader category of ‘Shakespearean adaptations’, making their definition of *adaptation* almost a free-for-all. However, allowing a single term to denote such a broad spectrum of phenomena, as has been argued before, weakens the defining force of the word and renders it inaccurate and therefore ineffective. Howard realizes these shortcomings, but does not manage to effectively distinguish between adaptation and offshoot, leaving the two overlapping and interchangeable in most cases.

Quite contrary to this all-encompassing approach, editors Michelle MacArthur, Lydia Wilkinson and Keren Zaiontz in their preface to *Performing Adaptations: Essays and Conversations on the Theory and Practice of Adaptation*,²⁴ editors Christa Albrecht-Crane

¹⁹ Fischlin and Fortier 3.

²⁰ Margaret Jane Kidnie. *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*. London: Routledge, 2009. 5.

²¹ Kidnie 30. Again, one would expect that after Barthes terms such as a “genuine instance of the work” would not be used, but many authors still maintain that there may be such ideals to strive for.

²² Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer ed. *Shakespeare and Appropriation*. London: Routledge 2002. 1-12, 15-33.

²³ Tony Howard. *Shakespeare’s cinematic offshoots*. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*: Second Edition. Ed. Russell Jackson. Cambridge University Press, 2007. 303-5.

²⁴ Michelle MacArthur, Lydia Wilkinson and Keren Zaiontz ed. *Performing Adaptations: Essays and Conversations on the Theory and Practice of Adaptation*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009. xvii-xxvii.

and Dennis Cutchins of *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches*,²⁵ Milan Pribisic in *The Pleasures of "Theater Film": Stage to Film Adaptations*²⁶ and Bert Cardullo, editor of *Stage and Screen: Adaptation Theory from 1916 to 2000*²⁷ all emphasize that adaptation is the most suitable word for describing the phenomenon of reimagining Shakespeare's works in the settings of different performing media, but that this suitability should not be confused with an all encompassing quality. They suggest that in specific cases where the product moves away from the original to the borderline of recognizability, other expressions, such as reworking or appropriation may be more appropriate.

Alan C. Dessen in *Rescripting Shakespeare: The Text, the Director, and Modern Productions*,²⁸ and editors Lukas Erne and Margaret Jane Kidnie in the introduction of *Textual Performances: The Modern Reproduction of Shakespeare's Drama*²⁹ are even more exclusive about the use of the word and highlight the fact that *adaptation* is the only term that can unambiguously describe a work that is equally recognizable as stemming from a known source and as a new work. This is in accordance with Ruby Cohn's observations and an important element of the definition this dissertation will work with, as recognizability and creativity will be the key elements of the performances to be analyzed.

It is of special interest to look at terminologies favored by theoreticians of film adaptations. This question is relevant in the present discussion because, as I will point out in the final chapter, puppetry is in many ways closer in its methodology to the genre and the medium of film than it is to the live theater and thus, when we speak of adaptation to the puppet stage we can often observe parallel processes in adaptation to the screen. Theoreticians of cinematography seem not to be interested in finding any other expression and are quite content with consistently using *adaptation* in the context of films. Wendell M. Aycock and Michael Schoenecke, editors of *Film and Literature: A Comparative Approach to Adaptation*,³⁰ Linda Seger in *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact And Fiction Into Film*,³¹

²⁵ Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins ed. *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches*. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010. 25-40.

²⁶ Milan Pribisic. *The Pleasures of "Theater Film": Stage to Film Adaptations* In: *Redefining Adaptation Studies*. Ed. Dennis Cutchins, Laurence Raw, James M. Welsh. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010. 147-160.

²⁷ Bert Cardullo ed. *Stage and Screen: Adaptation Theory from 1916 to 2000*. New York: The Continuum Intl. Publishing Group, 2012. 1-17.

²⁸ Alan C. Dessen. *Rescripting Shakespeare: The Text, the Director, and Modern Productions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 64-93.

²⁹ Lukas Erne and Margaret Jane Kidnie ed. *Textual Performances: The Modern Reproduction of Shakespeare's Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 1-20.

³⁰ Wendell M. Aycock and Michael Schoenecke ed. *Film and Literature: A Comparative Approach to Adaptation*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1988. 1-4.

³¹ Linda Seger. *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact And Fiction Into Film*. New York : H. Holt and Co., 1992. 13-46.

Brian McFarlane in *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*,³² Thomas Leitch in *Twelve fallacies in contemporary adaptation theory*,³³ Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo, editors of *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*,³⁴ John M. Desmond in *Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature*³⁵ and Mary H. Snyder in *Analyzing Literature-to-Film Adaptations*,³⁶ although debating the extent to which an *adaptation* can be regarded as an original work, all agree that no other term but *adaptation* is accurate enough to be applied when speaking about films based on dramatic texts.³⁷

Another cinema studies expert, Timothy Corrigan in *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader*³⁸ also favors the use of *adaptation*. He, however, suggests that *adaptation* is not only a precise term to be used for cinematic re-workings, but is also one that describes something of the same artistic value as the original. While the first part of his definition of *adaptation* further supports the claim that in the terminology of the cinema (and correspondingly in that of puppetry) *adaptation* is the most applicable term, it is worth reflecting on the second part of Corrigan's description, since if we fully accepted it, it would severely limit the applicability of the word. Adaptation as a critical term or an artistic process cannot be a value-judgment. It is the audience and ultimately time that decides the worth of a literary piece, a theater production or a film, and it does not help the creative process to be obsessed with the ultimate value of the product. Furthermore, if *adaptation* were indeed commonly accepted as describing something of the same value as the original (which value itself goes through continuous historical change), this would render the term useless in the context of performing and reinterpreting the works of Shakespeare, Goethe, Chekhov and many other great authors, since the pressure of having to create something as 'valuable' as the original would surely paralyze most directors. This approach would cause a great deal of tension in the world of the theater and film, yet it would not help thin the overwhelming number of mediocre adaptations, since most productions would simply be labeled as

³² Brian McFarlane. *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 1-30.

³³ Thomas Leitch. *Twelve fallacies in contemporary adaptation theory*. *Criticism*, 45.12 (2003) 149-171.

³⁴ Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo ed. *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. 7-54.

³⁵ John M. Desmond. *Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006. 1-5.

³⁶ Mary H. Snyder. *Analyzing Literature-to-Film Adaptations*. New York: Continuum, 2011. 1-39.

³⁷ Arguably, many drama adaptations, and especially adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, are not only based on the dramatic text but on the numerous intertextual and cultural associations, iconic images and even common misconceptions attached to these plays. The dramatic text, as any other text, calls for a contextual and intertextual interpretive approach, since meaning is always context-dependent, and emerges within the field of a cultural semantics that interpreters have to observe. This is, in fact, one of the main points I will make in Chapters 3 and 4.

³⁸ Timothy Corrigan. *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1999. 12-31.

something other than *adaptation*. At the same time, any production labeled as an *adaptation* of Shakespeare would merely suggest that the director was either overly ambitious or immensely self-satisfied. Most definitions are either too narrow or too broad, but Corrigan's seems simply unserviceable.

Another group of theoreticians whose works are centered on the relationship of the original and the adaptation are also in agreement in consistently using *adaptation* to describe a work based on an existing original. Anthony Grafton in *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship*,³⁹ Henry Woudhuysen in "*Work of permanent utility*": *Editors and Texts, Authorities and Originals*⁴⁰ and David L. Kranz and Nancy C. Mellerski editor of *In/Fidelity: Essays on Film Adaptation*⁴¹ all explore the problem of fidelity and creativity in adaptations and question the authority of any adapting medium to reinvent Shakespearean plays, but do not question the fundamental aptness of the term *adaptation* itself in describing the instances of these reinvented performances.

Finally, John R. Ford in *Recounting Our Dreams: Imagining Shakespeare in Two Recent Film and Televised Adaptations of A Midsummer Night's Dream*⁴² explains that although other terms exist, it is only *adaptation* that refers to a work of art that simultaneously reproduces and opposes the original. As reproducing *and* opposing a dramatic text will necessarily result in a product that is both different from but also recognizable as stemming from the original, this interpretation of the term *adaptation* will become an important element of the following discussion.

Although admittedly there may be a merit to using alternative terms in certain specific instances, it is clear that there is no general substitute for *adaptation*, and neither is there any clear guideline as to which alternative term would be required in the specific instance of staging Shakespeare in the puppet theater. If any of the above (or indeed, any of the numerous other existing) taxonomies were consistently accepted by theater theoreticians, practitioners and critics, I should perhaps be using the term *adaptation* more sparingly, occasionally substituting it with 'emendation', 'transformation' or 'appropriation'. No taxonomy is generally accepted, however, and neither is there a better technical term that can refer to all of the above processes and at the same time to the actual product of a new work of art, stemming

³⁹ Anthony Grafton. *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990. 36-68.

⁴⁰ Henry Woudhuysen. "*Work of permanent utility*": *Editors and Texts, Authorities and Originals*. In: Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, ed. *Adaptations of Shakespeare*. 37-62.

⁴¹ David L. Kranz and Nancy C. Mellerski ed. *In/Fidelity: Essays on Film Adaptation*. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2008. 197-227.

⁴² John R. Ford. *Recounting Our Dreams: Imagining Shakespeare in Two Recent Film and Televised Adaptations of A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 26.3 (2008): 31-43.

from an existing original. *Adaptation*, albeit at times too narrow, and at other times too broad, is the term I will continue using as it remains more suitable than anything else.

Having settled on an appropriate term to describe the phenomenon of reworking original material to create something new, it is now important to formulate a working definition of the term *adaptation* in order to clarify how exactly it is used here. As Hutcheon notes, *adaptation* denotes both “the process and the product”,⁴³ and this dual quality of the word is one of its key appeals in using it as opposed to other terms. However, in order to be able to use the term in both its meanings, both denotations first need to be defined in the context of Shakespearean adaptations to the puppet stage. When discussing the *product* of a reworked Shakespearean play in a medium very different from the live stage, the most prominent requirement is that *adaptation* should signal “a relationship with an informing source text or original”,⁴⁴ since the purpose of creating an adaptation, as opposed to an entirely original work is precisely to represent an instance of an existing original. Therefore, one of the most important criteria in my definition of *adaptation as product* will be recognizability.

This recognizability will not only mean a signaled relationship with the dramatic text, but, when watching an adaptation, it will also include our recollection of all previous experiences of the given play as read, seen in the theater or on the movie screen, as well as the recognition of associations and the identification of images from the play that have become a part of our culture. Recognizability is important not mainly because it fulfills the requirements of terminology but because it is the audience’s recognition of the above listed elements that allows them to interpret a performance as *adaptation*. Many puppet theater productions, as will be shown later, build on these elements much more than on the dramatic text in creating their adaptations of Shakespeare. Recognition of the original, however, although a key element in labeling a performance as an *adaptation*, is not as straightforward a concept as it may seem at first. The creator of a performance may strive to trigger in his audience the recognition of an existing dramatic work, but the recognition of an original may in fact be relative to a number of factors. Audiences with different cultural or educational backgrounds may have different levels of knowledge, or even no knowledge at all, of the dramatic work being adapted, and therefore, even if the intention of the artist is to recall images of the original work in his adaptation, this recognition may or may not happen in the spectator. But

⁴³ Hutcheon 7.

⁴⁴ Cohn 27.

if this is the case, how can we ever speak of an *adaptation* at all? Are *adaptations* like George Berkeley's trees in a park, which cease to exist when nobody is there to perceive them?⁴⁵

In my opinion the question has to be divided into two parts and these two parts must be treated separately. On the one hand, from the point of view of the audience, I suppose one must accept a kind of Berkeleyan subjective idealism and allow that an *adaptation* exists only as long as someone perceives it as *adaptation*, and exists only for those who do so. In the perception of those who do not recognize the literary source, a performance is still a performance, but it ceases to be an adaptation. On the other hand, from the point of view of the creators of a performance, it is the intention of said creators that must determine whether a production should be considered an *adaptation* or not. Some adaptations aim at reaching the widest possible audience by building heavily on those elements of Shakespeare's drama that one expects most people in the world with a basic, elementary level education to recognize as Shakespearean. Such a performance is Nola Rae's nonverbal adaptation of *Hamlet* (to be analyzed in Chapter 3) which brings forth the most basic motifs that one would associate with *Hamlet*, such as the poisoning through the ear, the duel, the poison cup, the drowning, the fight in the grave and, of course, the skull. As the webpage of the University of Ottawa, Canada, dedicated to the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, to be celebrated in 2016 states, Shakespeare is "a form of cultural Esperanto – a common 'language' shared among nationalities",⁴⁶ and Rae's and similar adaptations rely on this universality of Shakespeare and his themes.

Other performances are subtler in prompting the audience's recognition of the original, and may, therefore, not be recognizable as adaptations for all. Such a performance, one that is, as the creators have phrased it, "aimed at advanced audiences",⁴⁷ is *Exit Hamlet* (to be analyzed in Chapter 3), which, although set in a grave yard and featuring a skull, does not employ any other instantly recognizable 'Hamletian' object and yet serves as one of the most shining examples of how puppetry can translate Shakespearean themes into the language of images. The concept of recognizability is central to both kinds of adaptations, i.e. those aiming to reach the widest audience possible, and those aimed at the more knowledgeable spectators. There can be no objective measure for recognizability, however; the most a

⁴⁵ George Berkeley. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 1734. section 45. The more renowned quote "If a tree falls in a park and there is no one to hand, it is silent and invisible and nameless" is from William Fossett (*Natural States*, R. & J. Dodsley, Pall Mall. London. 1754)

⁴⁶ <http://artsites.uottawa.ca/shakespeare-celebrations/en>

⁴⁷ From a personal interview with Michael Vogel and Charlotte Wilde, March 2002.

consciously labeled adaptation may strive for is to demonstrate a connection to its original that the creators deem to be recognizable to their own target audience.

While prompting the recognition of an existing original in a target audience, the adaptation of a drama to a medium different from the live stage will necessarily involve *creativity*, as well, in order to suit the performance to the needs and requirements of the new medium. Thus, *adaptation* may involve “the addition of new material alongside substantial cutting and rearrangement”,⁴⁸ and as a result, my definition of *adaptation as process* will need to include the possibility of cutting, supplementing and changing the original, but all within the boundaries of recognizability. Taking all the above criteria into consideration, the definition of *adaptation* as both process and product, as proposed for use in the context of Shakespearean adaptations to the puppet stage, is the following:

Adaptation (as a process) is the phenomena of reduction *and* emendation *and* transformation *and* recontextualization, used in a creative way to produce a work of art (i.e. an *adaptation* as a product) that will be an acknowledged, and thereby recognizable interpretation of the original.

1.2. Questions of *adaptation* in the context of staging Shakespeare in the puppet theater

Settling on an acceptable definition is an essential requirement for being able to discuss *adaptation* as both process and product without relativizing the term each time it is used. Definitions, however, are generally more helpful when one aims at grasping the nature of phenomena and less so when the objective is to understand the workings of said phenomena. Correspondingly, the definition provided above is quite efficient at describing what *adaptation as product* will denote in the context of the present discourse but does not adequately clarify what *adaptation as process* actually involves. Such a definition does little in the way of explaining what exactly it is we are doing when we are *adapting* Shakespeare, for instance, and thus, *adaptation as process* will require further clarification.

Jan Kott, one of the most influential Shakespearean scholars of the 20th century provides an interesting explanation of what adapting Shakespeare might entail:

One says to Shakespeare: thank you very much for providing us with this story, but we don't really need you any longer as we are going off in another direction. In just the same way as Shakespeare might have said 'thank you' to Belleforest or Kyd or Holinshed or Boccaccio.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Hutcheon 7.

⁴⁹ Marowitz 110.

As much as I appreciate the commentary of Kott, I believe he is somewhat exaggerating, even if only to emphasize a perfectly valid point. It is possible that some of his remarks found in this recorded conversation with theater director Charles Marowitz are more radical than usual because Marowitz himself is a strong, and at times even extreme, advocate of the freedom of the theater; however, Kott's above description of the process of adapting Shakespeare is valid only as long as one considers himself at least as great, or even greater than Shakespeare. Shakespeare could easily say farewell to his sources because he only needed the stories they had written (or had themselves adapted from other sources), but he did not need their *name* and *fame*, that is to say all that is connected to a 'brand name'.

It is quite obvious that in choosing to stage a Shakespeare play as opposed to, for example, a possibly similarly great Marlowe play, we are jumping on the bandwagon. Shakespearean adaptations have enjoyed, and will probably continue to enjoy the attention of a much wider audience than productions of any other playwright. If we forget, for now, about the immense burden of expectations connected to a Shakespearean adaptation and concentrate only on the benefits of staging his plays, it becomes evident that we *do* need Shakespeare, not only for the stories and themes his plays provide, but also for the 'Shakespeare brand', i.e. all that his name means, and which makes a production appeal to the public more than, say, the 'Jonson brand' or even the highly popular 'Chekov, Shaw, Moliere or Ibsen brands'. This is not to suggest that there is no other motivation for staging Shakespeare than his name being a sure bet to bring in the audience. It is no less exciting for theater makers to work with a Shakespeare play than it is for theater audiences to experience it. One should not forget, however, that the reason for producing an adaptation as opposed to an entirely original piece of art is precisely to create something that is innovative, but at the same time recognizably stemming from an existing, and in most cases, already successful work. The truth is that while thanking him for providing us with a story, we continue to need Shakespeare, as him being the most famous playwright of all time is at least one of the reasons for choosing one of *his* plays to adapt.

With this said, one should recognize that Kott does hit the nail on the head when he talks about "going off in another direction".⁵⁰ Whether it is a literary genius rewriting a story or an average dramaturge, director or puppeteer transforming a play according to the requirements of another medium, what all adaptations will necessarily have to do is find their own direction. In the same interview, Kott says, "we have to force the classical texts to give

⁵⁰ Marowitz 110.

us new answers. But to obtain new answers, we have to bombard them with new questions”.⁵¹ These new questions will shape the direction a certain adaptation will take and define the answers one can get.

To be very specific then, adapting a Shakespearean play to the puppet stage will require that we: (1) look for and find those elements of the drama which make it relevant for our time and social environment and which can lead us to a new direction for presenting the play; (2) define and follow this newfound direction which differs but also stems from the traditions that take us back to the “original” and its origins, in order to produce a creative interpretation of the play; and (3) in following this direction transform, reduce and emend the play, within the limits of recognizability, to render it suitable for the medium of the puppet theater. Based on these three steps three questions can be formulated. These questions are the following: (1) WHY (why are new adaptations justifiable and relevant); (2) WHAT (what is the new direction that the specific adaptation will take) and; (3) HOW (how can the puppet stage lend new relevance and actuality to the text and how can the play be suited for the puppet stage in light of the potential horizons of expectations of the audience).

The first question, concerning the relevance and justification of new adaptations, will be addressed in the next chapter. The two remaining questions – one addressing the new direction a specific adaptation will take and the other examining the ways in which puppetry and the play can best serve one another and the audience – have provided the backbone of the process of staging my own adaptation, *Re:Hamlet*, and will present the basis for the analysis of the process of adaptation in Chapter 4.

1.3. Conclusion

This chapter set out to define and contextualize the term most frequently used in this dissertation: *adaptation*. I began the investigation by establishing how and why, in the context of a puppet theater performance of a Shakespearean play, the word *adaptation* should be used as opposed to a number of other available terms. It was shown that although in specific instances expressions such as *appropriation*, *reduction*, *emendation*, *transformation* and *recontextualization* may be appropriate, there is no other term that can include all of the above to refer to the creation of a puppet theater staging which will be an acknowledged, and thereby recognizable interpretation of an existing original, in this case a Shakespeare play.

⁵¹ Marowitz 109.

The next chapter will examine two adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* in order to provide a basic understanding of the tools and methods of the puppet theater.

Chapter 2. Understanding the Puppet Theater

A Shakespeare scholar discussing puppetry may find it most appropriate to speak about the puppet theater as a “suitable medium” for adapting Shakespeare because *it can serve the plays* by presenting themes in a very unique way, bringing to light elements and motifs in the dramatic work different from what any other performing medium is capable of. A puppeteer discussing Shakespeare may choose to say that Shakespeare is “wonderful material” for the puppet theater because *his plays can serve puppetry* by allowing it to present certain themes in a way no other genre is capable of. Since, although with different points of departure, the point each statement is making is the same, in the context of the present dissertation it is most appropriate to speak about the plays and puppetry serving each other, and the two together, in turn, serving the audience. Following the reasoning presented in the previous chapter (i.e., that performance can be considered as original in its own right, but at the same time an adaptation of Shakespeare will consciously draw upon the name and fame of the author), it is possible to accept both points of view as valid. Throughout this dissertation I will be presenting both sides of the same argument, at times with more emphasis on Shakespeare and at others focusing more on the presenting medium, but always with the aim of explaining why and how puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare can be successful.

This chapter is of the latter variation, aiming at facilitating a basic understanding of the properties of the puppet stage. This basic understanding will be important in order to appreciate how the tools and methodology of puppetry can prove productive in the specific case of adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays to the puppet stage. The puppet theater has, from its very beginnings, been an independent genre from the live theater and, although the two have often inspired one another to adopt new methods, puppetry has remained an autonomous medium governed by its own rules and modes of representation throughout most of its history. Puppetry has, however, for the greater part of its five thousand years of existence,⁵² been a marginalized area of theater arts. It was not until the 19th century, and mainly owing to German poet, playwright and novelist Heinrich von Kleist’s 1810 essay “*On a Theatre of*

⁵² Eileen Blumenthal in *Puppetry and Puppets: An Illustrated World History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005) claims that puppetry had simultaneous origins between 3000 and 2000 BC in various areas of the world, such as China, India and Egypt. 9.

Marionettes”,⁵³ that scholars began to consider the possibility of viewing puppetry as more than just a sideshow to live acting. As Penny Francis notes, Kleist

was the first of the Romantics to bring the aesthetics of a puppet performance to the attention of an educated public, and one of the first to endow the puppet figure with sentiment, praising it as a performer without the ego or self-consciousness of the human.⁵⁴

Sources addressing the phenomenon of puppetry dating from before Kleist’s essay⁵⁵ generally viewed it as either a part of religious rites or as cheap entertainment, or at best an imitation of the live stage. Indeed it seems that scholarship concerning the aesthetics, rather than the history of the puppet (elevating puppetry to a level where it can be discussed not merely as a cultural phenomenon but as a form of theater art) can scarcely be found preceding Kleist.⁵⁶ Owing to Kleist’s essay and symbolist writers and avant-garde practitioners

⁵³ I have consulted two English translations of Kleist’s essay, one entitled *On the Marionette Theatre*, the other *On a Theatre of Marionettes*. The edition used in this dissertation is the following: Heinrich von Kleist, *On a Theatre of Marionettes*. Trans. Michael Lebeck. Mindelheim: Three Kings Press, 1970.

⁵⁴ Francis 121.

⁵⁵ As Bernd Fischer notes in his introduction to *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich von Kleist*, Kleist is “often perceived as far ahead of his time” 2. In the reading of a puppeteer this is strikingly true about those sections of his essay where he talks about the aesthetics of the marionette theater. Kleist, however, also addresses some of the more typical issues of his time in the same piece, which demonstrates that although he does provide radical points of view in a number of matters, his writing is none the less deeply imbedded in Romantic thought. Hinrich C. Seeba in *Kleist’s Visual Poetics of Knowledge* talks about how “Kleist caught the pain of self-reflexive knowledge in the image of a young man who suddenly becomes aware of himself and, in this psychologically fraught instance of development, loses the innocence of his childhood” 105. Bernhard Greiner writes about Kleist’s experience and conception of language and speech and points out how “in this essay the constellation of successful speech with regard to a “you” that, without intervening, simultaneously provides the speaker with both expression and thought is described as the grace of the puppet” 135. Tim Mehigan in *Kleist, Hume, Kant, and the “Thing in Itself”* quotes Wolf Kittler (1987) who argues that „*Über das Marionettentheater* represents Kleist’s response to the question of the failure of the Prussian generals to secure a victory over the French in the war of 1792–93” 184. Kleist, therefore, as Fischer remarks, “can be understood as a son of his time” 2. In terms of thinking about the aesthetics of the puppet, however, he is undoubtedly a “uniquely radical” (Fischer 2) figure who paved the way for all later authors writing about puppetry.

⁵⁶ Sources about the tools and representational methods of puppetry before Kleist’s essay are few and far in between, and authors from before the 19th century generally quote mentions of seeing a show rather than present aesthetic examinations. George Speaight in *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* (London: Robert Hale, 1990) says about antiquity: “puppets were certainly known, and there is no lack of literary and metaphorical references, comparing man to the marionette” 25. Specific details are almost nonexistent, however. Speaight quotes Athenseus from the 1st century B.C. who mentions seeing a puppet player in Athens, but then he concludes that “With this one tantalizing exception, there is not a single description of a definite puppet performance in the whole corpus of Greek and Roman literature” 25. The situation is very similar for all of European history leading up to the Early Modern period, where some more descriptive, if not analytical, mentions may be found. One notable example is Ben Jonson’s 1614 *Bartholomew Fair* in which he describes a contemporary puppet show. We also know from Shakespeare that puppetry was an established form of entertainment. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* we read, “O excellent motion! O exceeding puppet!” (2.1.94), where ‘motion’ is an Elizabethan term referring to a puppet or a puppet play. Penny Francis in *Puppetry – A Reader in Theatre Practice* (10) also talks about market-place puppet shows in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, called ‘motions’. A number of entries in Samuel Pepys’ diary also refer to puppet shows the author had seen between 1660-69. Speaight mentions several other references to puppets and puppet plays from Shakespeare’s time, as well as from the following two centuries. None of these, or any of the previously mentioned references, however, convey useful information about the representational properties or the aesthetic

influenced by it almost a century later, there has been considerable scholarship from as early as the beginning⁵⁷, but most notably from the middle⁵⁸, of the 20th century not only on the history, but also on the artistic status of the puppet theater, and these works have helped puppetry position itself among the theater arts. Puppetry had undoubtedly earned its status both as an independent performing medium and as a field worthy of scholarly study by the 20th century, and scholars are re-defining the characteristics of the genre even today.⁵⁹

Established an art form it may be, however, puppetry is still a relatively marginal medium when compared to the live theater.⁶⁰ Most audiences therefore, will likely be more

qualities of the puppet (the object of investigation in this dissertation), and these sources are, therefore, of secondary interest here.

⁵⁷ As John Bell in notes in *Puppets, Masks and Performing Objects* (London: The MIT Press, 2001), “at the end of the 19th century, new thinking emerged in the suggestive, symbolist-oriented work of Oscar Wilde (1909), Alfred Jarry (1965) and W.B. Yeats (1921)” (6). Arguably the writing most influential on later theoreticians was Craig’s 1911 *The Actor and the Übermarionette* in which he claims that the actor’s ‘humanness’, his emotions and self-consciousness are a hindrance for the director. His ideal, therefore, was to be able to substitute the puppet for the actor. As Craig writes, “The actor must go and in his place comes the inanimate figure – the Übermarionette [...] the descendants of a great and noble family of Images” (in: *The Mask* 1:3b–16b). This way of thinking, following the aesthetics of Kleist, helped pave the way for theorists to consider puppets as something other than either ritual objects or means of cheap entertainment. Bell (7) lists avantgarde artists, such as F.T. Marinetti, Wassily Kandinsky, Fernand Léger, André Breton and Oskar Schlemmer as also having been instrumental in establishing the puppet as an object of artistic representation.

⁵⁸ Nina Efimova’s insistence on puppetry not copying the live theater (in *Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theater*. Michigan: Puppetry Imprints, 1935) had a prominent role in establishing the modern aesthetics of the puppet theater. Jiří Veltruská and Jindřich Honzl, members of the so called ‘Prague School’ were also important in the middle of the 20th century in shaping the way the puppet theater is thought of today by arguing that any stage vehicle can stand for another: there are no absolutely fixed representational relations. The actor can therefore be represented by a puppet, but the puppet does not become an ‘imitation’ of the actor but is a representational sign in its own right (*Postscript: Prague School Semiotics*. In *Semiotics of Art: Prague School Contributions*. Ed. Ladislav Matejka and Irwin R. Titunik. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 1976. 265-90). Paul McPharlin and Marjorie Batchelder laid the foundation for serious studies of puppetry in North America with *The Puppet Theatre in America* (1969). Theater historian Allardyce Nicoll published a study in 1963, entitled *Masks, Mimes and Miracles: Studies in the Popular Theatre* (Cooper Square Publ. Incorporated) in which he contrasts the ritual, popular and artistic aspects of puppetry, elaborating on the artistic qualities of the genre. However, the most influential work of the middle of the century is undoubtedly the world-renowned Russian puppet master Sergey Obraztsov’s *My Profession* (Foreign Languages Publishing House: Moscow, 1961 [1950]). He was among the first who presented a comprehensive analysis of the nature of the puppet and the puppet theater based not only on observation but also on his personal experience as a puppeteer and as a teacher of puppetry.

⁵⁹ Some of today’s most notable theoreticians of the puppet theater (available in English) are Henryk Jurkowski (*Aspects of Puppet Theatre*. London: Puppet Centre Trust, 1988), Michael Meschke (*In search of aesthetics for the puppet theatre*. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts: Sterling Publishers, 1992) Steve Tillis (*Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet*. London: Greenwood Press, 1992), Scott Cutler Shershow (*Puppets and “Popular” Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), John Bell (*Puppets, Masks and Performing Objects*, ed. London: The MIT Press, 2001) and Penny Francis (*Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁶⁰ As Stephen Kaplin states in *A Puppet Tree – A Model for the Field of Puppet Theatre* (in: John Bell ed.: *Puppets, Masks and Performing Objects*, 18), “Over the past several decades, puppet theatre in America has experienced a period of extraordinary growth, cross-cultural miscegenation, and technological advancement. Within this relatively short time, puppetry has been transformed from a marginalized and overlooked genre of children’s and folk performance to an integral part of contemporary theatre, film, and television. A whole generation of puppeteers has labored to synthesize stylistic influences from around the planet and to meld emerging technology with traditional forms.” This optimistic outlook may be true for The United States, however, it is not representative of the situation of puppetry in the world today. Puppetry, especially artistic

familiar with the world of the live theater than with that of puppetry. It is for this reason that the live theater will be used as a point of reference in order to show the workings of the puppet theater both as an independent means of communication and as a genre contributing copiously to the apparatus of the live stage. In the following then, I will first discuss the basic differences between the live stage and the puppet theater, as well as between the actor and the puppet itself. Then, through the analysis of two adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, one for the dramatic stage and one for the puppet stage,⁶¹ I will try to explain not only the fundamental differences, but also the common points between the two genres. While identifying the specific tools of puppetry, I will also show examples of how the live theater has made use of the methodology of the puppet theater when presenting a Shakespearean play.

2.1. The idiom of the puppet stage I.

As proposed in the introduction of the dissertation, puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare are, if not abundant, but generally well received by critics and audiences alike. These performances are instrumental in, on the one hand, promoting puppetry for those interested in Shakespeare and, on the other hand, bringing Shakespeare to audiences whose primary interest is in the presenting medium of the puppet stage. A *Romeo and Juliet* or a *Hamlet*, however, cannot function in the puppet theater by simply substituting the actors with puppets. The puppet theater requires a different theatrical idiom with its unique tools, methods and modes of representation. To be able to talk about puppetry and analyze puppet theater productions of Shakespeare's plays, it is necessary to understand the basic properties and techniques of puppetry, many of which are quite different from those of the live stage.

Steve Tillis in *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet*, when talking about puppet theater adaptations of Shakespearean plays in particular, raises the question why the artist should "choose to employ puppets, and the audience desire to see puppets, if the drama is known to

puppet theater for adults, remains if not overlooked, but definitely a marginal curiosity within the performing arts.

⁶¹ Some of the productions I will analyze in this dissertation have also been included in my MA thesis written in 2006. Shakespeare on the puppet stage is too rare a phenomenon to have the luxury of disregarding important performances one has already dealt with and choose others to examine instead. I will, therefore, include *Romeo and Juliet* by Divadlo Drak and *Hamlet* by Figurentheater Wilde&Vogel, two of the most renowned puppet theater adaptations of the last decade and a half; performances that cannot be excluded from a treatment of Shakespearean adaptations for the puppet stage. I will also take a fresh look at *És Rómeó és Júlia* directed by Ádám Horgas and *Prospero's Books* by Peter Greenaway, two adaptations abundantly using the methodology of puppetry, in order to draw attention to important connections between the genres of puppetry, the live stage and the cinema.

work perfectly well with actors”.⁶² He asks: “If there is no fundamental difference between the audience’s knowledge of the actor and of the puppet, then what is gained by the use of the puppet instead of the actor?”⁶³ The question itself, of course, implies that, seeing the success of such adaptations, there must indeed be a fundamental difference between *actor* and *puppet*, and identifying some of the main characteristics of this difference will be necessary in order to later discuss the difference between the *live stage* and the *puppet theater*.

I will suggest two statements to explain the distinction between the live stage and the puppet theater. I propose that the essential difference is in the very existence of the actor versus the puppet, because (1) while the *puppet represents life*, the *actor is life*, but (2) whereas the actor *represents a character*, the puppet *is the character*. These statements will obviously require further qualification. Alexander Bakshy, Russian-born critic of the first part of the 20th century claims “We can never apply the same standards to the man and the puppet. [...] The puppet can never live unless it acts. The man can never act unless he lives”.⁶⁴ In Bakshy’s context the verb ‘act’ is not employed in its theatrical sense of ‘performing’ but in the sense of ‘taking action’ or ‘doing something’ and thus, Bakshy’s statement suggests that the basic difference between man and puppet is that while for man to be able to act the only criterion is to live, and therefore the very fact of *being* allows for the possibility of action, the puppet can only be given life by being given action and therefore without the quality of action, the puppet *is not*. Appealing as this may sound (and true in most instances), as we shall see later, this is not necessarily the case. Although, as will be argued in Chapter 4, one of the basic semiotic principles of the puppet is indeed movement, action is not always required in order for a puppet to convey the illusion of life, as is the case with “figurative puppets”.⁶⁵ Bakshy, however, does make the important point that the actor, that is the human being, just by living, inherently ‘*is*’, while this is not necessarily true for the puppet.

Samuel Weber in *Theatricality as Medium* also reflects upon the nature of the puppet based on the criterion of action, he however, contests the claim that puppets are able to *act* at all and writes that “the ‘body’ of a puppet, a marionette, is never self-contained, not an organic whole; rather, it *reflects* impulses that come from without. Puppets cannot therefore

⁶² Tillis 42.

⁶³ Tillis 42.

⁶⁴ Qtd in Tillis 45.

⁶⁵ Term introduced by Penny Francis 18. Francis uses the term as it is employed in the context of visual arts, i.e., “representing something as it really looks” as opposed to its use in literature and linguistics to refer to words “not with their basic meaning but with a more imaginative meaning, in order to create a special effect (Cambridge Online Dictionary, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary>). According to Francis, figurative puppets may occasionally represent life even when not given movement.

be said to ‘act’ but at most to *react* to such impulses”.⁶⁶ This is a very important observation because although the reaction Weber talks about will be perceived by the audience as movement initiated by the puppet itself, such movement will become a *representation* of action as performed, on an outside impulse, by an inanimate object.

Henryk Jurkowsky in his seminal work *Aspects of Puppet Theatre* states that “the main and basic feature that differentiates [the puppet] from the live theatre is that the speaking and performing object makes temporal use of the physical sources of its vocal and driving powers, which represent beyond the object”.⁶⁷ Jurkowsky later argues that although the actor will also represent something other than himself, he can never represent anything beyond life. This distinction brings us closer to the aspect of the puppet as *representing* life and *representing* action as opposed to man *having* life and *acting*.

John McCormick in *The Victorian Marionette* explains that “where the actor is at one remove from the character represented, the puppet representing an actor in a part is at a further remove”.⁶⁸ This in turn will mean that while the actor, by having life (i.e., by *being*) will be able to represent a character without any further necessity for representing life itself, the puppet will need to take this additional step (i.e., representing life before being able to represent a character). John Bell in *Puppets, Masks and Performing Objects* also emphasizes the fact that puppets are two steps removed from the character they represent and writes: “unlike actors, puppets are [...] material images reflecting an iconicity between a material object (sign vehicle) and the animate being for which it stands”.⁶⁹

Some authors refer to this ‘twice removed’ quality of the puppet by treating it as an abstract entity or a rhetorical sign. Penny Francis quotes American puppeteer Eric Bass, who says “puppets are, because they are not human, immediately metaphors”.⁷⁰ It is from this observation that Bass comes to the very conclusion I proposed as one of the defining differences between actor and puppet (i.e. one representing a character, the other being the character): “The actor can play a role, too, but the puppet *is* the role”.⁷¹ In a similar vein, one of the most influential puppet artists of the 20th century, Sergey Obraztsov writes about the difference between man and puppet in *My Profession* saying “The puppet is not a man, it is an allegory of man. Like all allegories, it has the power of generalizing reality”.⁷²

⁶⁶ Samuel Weber. *Theatricality as Medium*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004. 219.

⁶⁷ Jurkowsky 31.

⁶⁸ John McCormick. *The Victorian Marionette Theatre*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004. 65.

⁶⁹ Bell 19.

⁷⁰ Francis 8.

⁷¹ Francis 14.

⁷² Obraztsov 20.

Finally, it seems that it is Tillis who best manages to answer his own question concerning the fundamental difference between the puppet and the human actor by combining the qualities of the puppet as an inanimate object being perceived as having life, but at the same time being constituted of abstracted signs. Tillis says that the puppet “encourages the act of imagination [of life] by making use of abstracted signs of life. But the imagination of life does not necessarily follow from its representation”.⁷³ He concludes that in order for this inanimate representation of life, i.e. the object which *represents life* but *is not life itself*, to function as an actor “the audience’s willingness to make the leap from the perception of representative abstraction to the imagination of life”⁷⁴ is needed. This, as was shown by all the above observations, is a very different mechanism from what takes place in the live theater.

As for the other question raised by Tillis concerning the choice of employing puppets when performing Shakespeare, he does not give a straight answer. For him this was merely a side issue and it is therefore understandable if his question remains rhetorical. I will, however, pursue the query further, it being one of the central issues of this dissertation, and to which hopefully the entirety of the text will provide, if not a single answer, but a long line of arguments.

The innate difference between the puppet theater and the live stage, owing to the contrasting properties of puppet and actor, became even more pronounced in the middle of the 20th century with the advent of Stanislavski’s *Method*, a school of realism and naturalism described in his essays *My Life in Art*⁷⁵ and *An Actor Prepares*.⁷⁶ In *My Life in Art*, for example, the Russian actor-director says the following: “All we ask is that an actor on the stage live in accordance with natural laws”.⁷⁷ Puppetry, being an inherently abstract art form on which the laws of nature work in a very different way than on us mortals, did not follow the trends of unifying the psychological and physical elements of acting. The impossibility for a medium, where the actor is twice removed from the character, to follow the *Method*, is further enforced by another quote from Stanislavski: “The bond between body and soul is indivisible”.⁷⁸ This is obviously quite different in the case of puppetry where the body of the actor/manipulator and the body of the puppet/character are physically separated. Similarly, since the task of the puppeteer is to create the illusion of life by making the audience believe

⁷³ Tillis 65.

⁷⁴ Tillis 47.

⁷⁵ Konstantin Stanislavski. *My Life in Art*. London: Faber and Faber, 1950.

⁷⁶ Stanislavski. *An Actor Prepares*. London: Faber and Faber, 1967.

⁷⁷ Stanislavski, *My life* 70.

⁷⁸ Qtd in: Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis. *Drama, Theatre, Performance*. In: The New Critical Idiom Series. London and NY: Taylor & Francis, 2004, 181.

that the *inanimate* object does, in fact, have an *animus*, a soul, arguably the soul of the puppeteer is also divided, part of it being granted to the puppet. Penny Francis writes:

The puppet is selfless and breathes only with the help of its animator. The actor must discard the stability of his or her own body and learn to look through the puppet's eyes, hear through its ears and breathe for it. [...] The actor can believe in, and in many ways become, another person. It is one step further in the process to send this belief down your arm and into an inanimate object in order to make it, not yourself, the star of the show. It requires a rearrangement of many of your instincts as a performer.⁷⁹

As the psychological and philosophical implications of the puppet-puppeteer relationship are outside the scope of a dissertation focusing on the adaptability of Shakespearean pieces in the puppet theater, I will maintain a pragmatic approach and allow only that this relationship is quite different from that of the live actor and the character, owing to the inherent difference between the nature of actor and puppet.

The influential work of a number of symbolist writers and avant-garde practitioners and the aesthetic of the puppet presented by these artists in the first part of the 20th century (discussed earlier in the chapter), as well as the advent of a form of psychological realism in the theater essentially alien to puppetry were the key factors that helped the puppet theater ultimately establish itself as a genre independent and very different from the live stage. McCormick points to the growing popularity of movie theaters as an additional cause for the puppet theater to follow its own path and move further away from realistic representation when he writes “The naturalist theatre and cinema dragged audience perception toward a form of realism with which the marionette theatre could not hope to compete. As they moved into the twentieth century, marionettes began to lose the need to look real”.⁸⁰ Thus, puppetry managed to establish itself as a genre with its own, independent methods of representation not based on imitation, and has become almost universally recognized as something inherently abstract, symbolic and “non-realistic”.⁸¹ It is this recognition that László Halász, a psychologist associated with the Budapest State Puppet Theater in the 1970s reflects upon:

The puppet's remove from reality is in harmony with the remove from reality of its theatrical environment. This might be the quality that explains the puppet's persistence: the puppet intrinsically conforms to the artificiality of the theater, wherein, by convention, the audience is willing to imagine the puppet as having life, just as it is willing to imagine the theatrical environment to represent the play's reality.⁸²

⁷⁹ Francis 31.

⁸⁰ McCormick 82.

⁸¹ Term used by Tillis 50.

⁸² Qtd. in Tillis 50.

Since the quality of non-realism in the puppet theater is well understood today, when one uses the term *realistic* to describe a puppet performance, one does not refer to something that would transgress the boundaries of the symbolic nature of the puppet. Rather, *realism*, as it is generally employed in the context of puppet theater productions, seems a fairly straightforward term to a practitioner of puppetry: a measure of *realism* in a production denotes the extent to which, for example, the design of a puppet recalls the image of a human or an animal in the viewer. In terms of manipulation, *realism* usually refers to the extent to which the movement of a horse puppet, for example, reminds the spectator of the movement of a real horse. In both cases the experience is subjective and will vary from viewer to viewer, but each member of the audience will have a feeling about the measure of realism they each experienced, both in terms of design and movement. Speaking about ‘realistic design/movement’ or ‘highly stylized design/movement’, therefore, does not necessarily entail aesthetic judgment or philosophical depth, but is rather a way of expressing a describable experience on the part of the beholder. Since all puppets are inherently abstract and symbolic, assessing the level of realism or abstraction, or, in semiotic terms, assessing the difference between the attempt at photographic iconicity and the attempt at symbolic stylization, is merely a way to communicate an experience of *how much* one felt a specific puppet or performance to be stylized.

As I will show, the terms *realism* and *realistic* are used rather unequivocally by puppeteers and theoreticians of the puppet theater alike to refer to the phenomena described above. The concept of *realism* in theater semiotics is, however, a highly contentious issue, and since ‘realism’ and ‘realistic’ are expressions to be used frequently throughout the dissertation, it will be important to further clarify how they (as well as a number of other related terms, such as *naturalistic* and *imitative*, or conversely, *abstract*, *symbolic* and *stylized*) are used in the current discussion.

Although Matthew Potolsky states in *Mimesis*, that while “it has constituted one of the central problems for Western art, realism is exceedingly difficult to define”⁸³; he still provides a useful starting point in the assessment of how *realism* is to be understood. He offers that “Realism concerns the relationship between work and world, and defines mimesis by its more or less accurate reproduction of nature”.⁸⁴ Realism referring to an approximate reproduction of nature is not far from my own use of the word, yet, as Catherine Belsey notes in *Critical*

⁸³ Matthew Potolsky. *Mimesis*. New York and London: Routledge, 2006, 50.

⁸⁴ Potolsky 94.

Practice, “Realism is plausible not because it reflects the world, but because it is constructed out of what is (discursively) familiar”.⁸⁵ With this understanding we can speak not only about representation based on imitation, but also of a more specific aspect of realistic representation in the puppet theater: recognition based on familiarity.⁸⁶ Since, as stated above, all puppets are inherently symbolic, realism on the puppet stage may not only concern the actual quality of imitation but also a measure of recognizability based on the viewer’s familiarity with the real counterpart of the human or animal character presented on the puppet stage.

The difficulty in understanding what is generally meant by *realism* is well demonstrated by Russian linguist Roman Jakobson, who emphasizes the fact that the perception of *realism* not only changes with time, but is also a question of a point of view. Jakobson says, “The artist may or may not seek to give an accurate depiction of reality, and the viewer or reader may or may not judge the work to be realistic, regardless of what the artist intended”⁸⁷. This can indeed be the case since, as Belsey points out, realism is also a “culturally relative concept”⁸⁸ and therefore even if the intention of the artist is to depict what he or she considers ‘real’, the audience with a different cultural background may interpret it as something completely different. Jonathan Culler in *The Pursuit Of Signs* fittingly remarks: “What is realism at one level is fantasy at another”.⁸⁹

In the context of the puppet theater, however, *realism* is far from being such an elusive concept. The reason why we interpret one puppet as more *realistic* than another is because it simply takes less imagination, less creativity and less deciphering on our part to interpret its signs than does another. As Potolsky explains, “Works seem realistic to us because the key to reading them is so commonplace that we do not recognize it as a key”.⁹⁰ Realism, due to the inherently symbolic nature of the puppet, will never signify a one-to-one correspondence between “key” and “work” in the puppet theater. György Endre Szőnyi, in *Pictura & Scriptura* provides a comprehensive explanation of Peircean semiotics, according to which the term *realistic* would correspond to the iconic capacity of signs, while the term *abstract* would denote the employment of symbolic codes by the receivers in order to comprehend the message.⁹¹ Although a puppet with a realistic design is still not a fully iconic sign, this is

⁸⁵ Catherine Belsey. *Critical Practice*. London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005. 40.

⁸⁶ Recognition based on familiarity is a concept that also becomes important in its broader sense of the recognition of familiar motifs and images in puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare.

⁸⁷ Qtd. in Potolsky 96.

⁸⁸ Belsey 43.

⁸⁹ Jonathan Culler. *The Pursuit of Signs*. London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005. 69.

⁹⁰ Potolsky 106.

⁹¹ Szőnyi György Endre. *Pictura & Sriptura: Hagyományalapú Kulturális Reprezentációk Huszadik Századi Elméletei*. Szeged: JATEPress, 2004. 31-34.

nevertheless very close to the way these two terms are employed in my discussion of the puppet theater.

Let us see then how theoreticians of puppetry relate to the question of *realism* (iconicity) and *abstraction* (symbolicity). A telling example of the relatively unproblematic use of the terms is to be found in one of the most influential textbooks of puppetry today. Penny Francis in *Puppetry – A Reader in Theater Practice* defines the puppet as “a realistic or abstract figure, a piece of unformed material or a non-performative object”,⁹² and then continues using the terms *realistic* and *abstract* without further qualification. She distinguishes between the “figurative puppet”, explaining that these will be perceived as puppets even at rest “since the intention of its maker and its theatrical employment are obvious: it is a potential performer”, and the “object-puppet” which is only perceived as a puppet “when given life and breath in a performance by a puppeteer”.⁹³ This, however, is not a distinction between realistic or abstract puppets, as is well demonstrated by what Francis concludes: “the form of a figurative puppet can be realistic or abstract, exquisitely sculpted or roughly made. It can represent a human or animal or the concrete expression of an emotion, the symbol of an idea”.⁹⁴ *Figurative* and *realistic* are, thus, not synonymous, since, although a nonfigurative puppet or a performing object⁹⁵ generally requires a stronger employment of symbolic codes by the receiver than does the figurative puppet, the extent to which the decoding of a puppet, be it of the “figurative” or the “object” variety, may require the imagination of the perceiver, can still be evaluated on the scale of realism and abstraction.

The above logic is arguably representative of the use of *realism*, *abstraction* and their related terms in the literature of puppet aesthetics today. In the writings of Jurkowsky, Meschke, Bell, Tillis and Kaplin there seems to be a similar understanding as to what these expressions refer to. However, as straightforward as the use of these words may be, the function, and indeed the legitimacy of realism on the puppet stage is nevertheless a frequent, and not always unproblematic subject in the discourse. In order to better understand the often ambivalent standpoint of puppetry on the question of realistic versus abstract representation, a point that will become important in the specific instances of contemporary Shakespearean adaptations for the puppet stage, it is worth taking a brief look at a period in the history of the puppet theater when a very extreme form of realistic depiction coexisted on the puppet stage with a high degree of abstraction and symbolism. Almost two hundred years before

⁹² Francis 18.

⁹³ Francis 14.

⁹⁴ Francis 14.

⁹⁵ The term “performing object” was introduced by John Bell.

Stanislavski wrote the previously quoted lines, “All we ask is that an actor on the stage live in accordance with natural laws”,⁹⁶ puppetry came very close to the ideal of the “*Method*” and thus, to an aesthetic ideal much more suited to the live stage than to puppetry.

Although the most ancient forms of puppets, dating back to the Neolithic period, were symbolic tools connected to rites and religious rituals, as techniques of construction became more refined, many puppeteers, and especially those working with string marionettes (the most anthropomorphic of all puppets), moved away from the symbolic toward the realistic. Owing to hundreds of years of advancement in the methods of marionette construction (the oldest string puppets were found in Egypt and date back to over four thousand years ago), by the 18th century European puppeteers developed a type of marionette that was, both in its appearance and movement, more similar to a human being than any puppet had ever been before. Puppeteers and audience alike realized the potential and the magic in a figure that could mimic human gestures to the finest details, and the popularity of these anthropoid puppets opened new horizons for the art of marionettes.

18th and early 19th century records seem to suggest that puppets, and especially string marionettes, were favored because of their ability to mimic human movement and gestures, or more specifically the movement and gestures of human actors and singers, because as McCormick explains, in the marionette opera “the first point of reference was the live theatre and not life itself”.⁹⁷ The high point of the marionette theater was brought about in the 18th century when the operas of Haydn and Mozart were performed on the marionette stage with live singers standing on the sides, and marionettes taking center stage. In Hungary, for example, the cream of society enjoyed the marionette performances of Haydn’s operas in the Esterhazy Castle, where even Maria Theresa, queen of Hungary (and most of Central Europe at the time) paid occasional visits to see the plays.

It was this genre, the marionette opera, which first demanded that marionettes imitate the live stage, not by distorting or mocking, but by precisely mirroring the gestures and movements of actors and singers. While the glove puppet, owing to its grotesque form, its disproportions and its inhumanly quick movements remained a symbolic theatrical tool, the string marionette became an instrument of perfect mimicry.⁹⁸ As Jurkowsky writes, “In announcements of the [Baroque] time, the puppet theater managers assured the public that

⁹⁶ Stanislavski, *My life* 70.

⁹⁷ McCormick 5.

⁹⁸ As McCormick notes, “The nineteenth-century theatre was heavily caught up in notions of realism and in the idea of trying to deceive the audience into a belief in the reality of what was being presented. The patent unreality of the glove puppet allowed it largely to escape this concern, but in the case of the marionette there was an extraordinary degree of ambivalence” 65.

their puppets would act like live actors”.⁹⁹ The marionettes copying the singers were required to do nothing else but that: to copy. Their function was to mimic the gestures of the live singers as precisely as possible.¹⁰⁰ In the era of the marionette opera realism became an indicator of quality and success, and a source of fascination for audiences.

The demand to achieve ever more refined imitation contributed generously to the further development of construction methods and manipulation techniques, but it also put marionette art into a very difficult situation, since an inanimate object, be it constructed and manipulated in the most elaborate way, can never become completely similar to a human being. The more the marionette strives for achieving a perfect replication of life, the more pronounced the limitations of the inanimate matter become. If the puppet theater tries to establish its artistic principles by attempting to conceal the mechanic nature of the puppet instead of emphasizing the differences between puppet and actor, there is a danger of puppetry being viewed as a not quite successful attempt at becoming ‘real theater’. As McCormick points out, “the aspiration to be taken for a real actor meant that the marionette could also be viewed as an inferior actor”.¹⁰¹ If the standard of quality is set by the ability to ‘act real’, the inanimate object will lose to the actor every time. If the puppet theater manages to set different standards, however, no human can ever measure up to the capabilities of the puppet, as we shall see shortly.

The very same genre that had led the puppet to such inferiority when compared to the abilities of the actor, the opera, was also the one to give birth to a style of puppetry that helped to liberate the puppets from the burden of having to mimic the live stage. The core idea of this new style, which grew out of ballet, an art form closely linked to the opera, was to break free of the bonds that keep humans on the ground. While puppets, without facial expressions and without a voice can never be completely similar to live actors, they can achieve such ‘perfection’ (as described by Kleist) in dance as humans would never be capable of. It was through dance that marionettes, as well as other types of puppets, moved into the realm of the

⁹⁹ Jurkowsky 72.

¹⁰⁰ As for the question of whether it is possible at all to mimic the gestures of the live singers or actors, Jurkowsky notes that “today it is hard to believe that a puppet could imitate an actor so perfectly that it might be treated as his miniature. However, this was quite possible in the operatic puppet theater of the 17th century. The acting of live singers and actors at the time was fully schematic. The singers stood in a row at the proscenium opening and made schematic gestures. To imitate such acting was easy for the puppet, especially since the light was not bright and the wire network hung in front of the stage hid the puppet’s strings” 72. McCormick explains that “Audiences accepted the ‘reality’ of the marionette (just as we accept the reality of strip cartoon figures today) and did not feel any particular need to question it. Once they had done this, they could enter into the reality of the fiction that the puppet was performing. The very real limitations of the marionette and its specifically puppet-like movements were not really an issue” 75.

¹⁰¹ McCormick 5.

symbolic, the abstract, the magical and the unreal.

The qualities of the puppet theater to represent the symbolic and the ‘unreal’ are now taken for granted by many puppeteers. Such an understanding of the properties of puppetry, however, is the result of centuries of experimentation with puppet adaptations of Miracles, Misteries, Commedia dell’Arte pieces, operas and classical drama. One of the earliest records of such a modernistic view of puppetry (that is, not expecting the inanimate object to substitute for live actors, but rather to explore the possibilities of breaking away from realism) is to be found in the already mentioned essay by Heinrich Von Kleist, *On a Theatre of Marionettes*. The approach Kleist applies in his dialogue written in the early years of the 19th century is one that is very close to the postmodern aesthetics of the puppet taught today at some of the most progressive schools of puppetry in the world. In a simulated dialogue about dancers and marionettes, Kleist has one of the interlocutors comment that marionettes possess a grace humans do not, and then goes on to say that marionettes

...haven’t discovered the law of gravity. They know nothing about the inertia of matter. In other words they know nothing of those qualities most opposed to the dance. The force that pulls them into the air is more powerful than that which shackles them to the earth. [...] These marionettes, like fairies, use the earth only as a point of departure; they return to it only to renew the flight of their limbs with a momentary pause. We, on the other hand, need the earth: for rest, for repose from the effort of the dance; but this rest of ours is, in itself, obviously not dance; and we can do no better than disguise our moments of rest as much as possible.¹⁰²

In Kleist’s example it is quite obvious that the author does not expect the puppets to perfectly mimic the movements of the live dancers. On the contrary, he goes on to suggest that the dance of the marionette is in some way superior to the dance of a human: “It is simply impossible for a human being to reach the grace of the jointed doll. Only a god can duel with matter on this level”.¹⁰³ Kleist’s analysis points to those interpretations of the function of the puppet that theoreticians of the late 20th and early 21st century, such as Jurkowsky, Bell, Meschke, Tillis, McCormick and Francis have put forward and which now shape our understanding of the aesthetics of artistic puppetry.

In discussing Kleist’s essay, McCormick remarks “The marionette landed itself right into the middle of the discussion about realism in the theatre”.¹⁰⁴ As he explains, although Kleist greatly advanced the understanding of the qualities of the puppet theater to represent

¹⁰² Kleist 8.

¹⁰³ Kleist 9.

¹⁰⁴ McCormick 4.

the symbolic rather than the naturalistic, the controversy between realism and abstraction on the puppet stage was still very much present in the early years of the 20th century. Writing in the 1920s about the naturalistic trend in the puppet theater, Russian ethnographer, linguist and semiotician Pyotr Bogatyrev (colleague and co-worker of Roman Jakobson) emphasizes that “The main goal of the advocates of the naturalistic trend is to so master their materials that the public will forget they are watching wooden puppets instead of human beings”.¹⁰⁵ As he explains, this naturalistic trend comes from folk puppeteers and he considers naturalism a tradition in folk art rather than a trend to follow in artistic puppet theater. For the latter he proposes that “The art of puppets is to maintain rather than lose their puppet nature, so that with their awkward, stylized movement they will achieve the greatest expressiveness possible – which not even living actors have yet been able to attain”.¹⁰⁶

The controversy was also present in the Hungarian puppetry scene of the 1920s and 1930s, but here the distinction between the naturalistic trend and abstract style was not a simple division between rural and urban traditions. Theater historian Eszter Papp, in her essay *Bábszínházi naturalizmus – kiút vagy zsákutca?* analyses the style of two of the most outstanding figures of Hungarian puppetry between the two World Wars, Géza Blattner and István Árpád Rév. She explains that while Rév saw the highest standard of puppetry in reproducing the signs of the live stage as faithfully as possible, Blattner felt that puppetry “can serve as a solution to the dead-ended situation of stage naturalism”¹⁰⁷ by breaking away from all forms of imitation. While Rév advertised his theater with posters saying “The first puppet theater for adults. Our puppets are alive. The movement of their body, arms, head and eyes are pure reality”¹⁰⁸, Blattner wrote the following about his own theater: “My goal is to eliminate the naturalistic imitation of movement, which, as I see it, is in stark contrast with the mechanic nature of puppets”.¹⁰⁹ As Papp states,

Both artists consciously strived for establishing the puppet theater as a medium for artistic representation, both considered it a central issue to create puppets and props of the highest artistic value and to adhere to the highest standards in questions of music, lighting and literary sources. Their aesthetic principles and goals, however, were not merely different, but complete opposites: one strived to imitate, the other to alienate from reality.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Qtd. in Bell 89.

¹⁰⁶ Qtd. in Bell 89.

¹⁰⁷ Papp Eszter. “Bábszínházi naturalizmus – kiút vagy zsákutca?” In: *Bábok és bábuk*, 2003.1., 11. (My translation).

¹⁰⁸ Papp 17 (my translation).

¹⁰⁹ Papp 11 (my translation).

¹¹⁰ Papp 17 (my translation).

While today no established theoretician of the field doubts that puppetry is abstract and symbolic in its nature, since the puppet itself is “but an object constituted of abstracted signs in the perception of the audience”,¹¹¹ the frequent use of the terms *realism* and *realistic* in the literature of puppet aesthetics is not merely the result of the authors’ disregard for the wider, and often controversial, implications of these expressions. Although McCormick provides valuable insight into those processes that have ultimately established puppetry as an ideal medium for abstraction and symbolism, his claim that “The great realism versus stylization debate in the theatre of the earlier twentieth century seems almost irrelevant when we discuss puppet theatre today”¹¹² is arguable on two points. First, the fact that significant scholars of puppet aesthetics and semiotics, many of them quoted here and referenced in McCormick’s own work, often speak of realism and stylization not in a historical, but in an aesthetic sense, in discussing contemporary puppet theater and its use of realistic and abstract puppets, props, scenes and manipulation, shows that the issue is far from irrelevant. Second, as a puppeteer traveling the world and, thus, having had the opportunity to see performances and meet puppeteers from all continents, I can attest to the fact that if not the debate, but the questions of what realism in the puppet theater means and how designers and performers relate to them are very much a part of the ongoing discourse in the field. The way an artist relates to these questions will ultimately define his or her own individual style of representation, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Although I hold common ground with a line of theoreticians starting with Kleist, and continuing with Vsevolod Meyerhold, Nina Efimova, John Bell, Scott Cutler Shershow, Steve Tillis, and ending with Penny Francis in that puppets are not suitable for replacing actors, that is, the aesthetic of the puppet should not be based on imitating the live stage but rather on the qualities that distinguish the puppet from the actor, I realize that the desire for an imitative puppet theater is still very strongly present among today’s puppet artists. As stated before, puppetry is now almost universally recognized as something inherently abstract, symbolic and “non-realistic”, the emphasis, however, is on the word *almost*. As the possibilities of naturalistic representation in staging Shakespeare in the puppet theater will be discussed in Chapter 4, here I will only point out the fact that the marionette opera, for instance, is still a

¹¹¹ Tillis 56.

¹¹² McCormick 220.

popular genre in many parts of Europe, and the way theaters performing such pieces relate to the question of realism is not always reflective of this ‘almost universal’ understanding.¹¹³

Although I consider the most important quality of the puppet to be its ability to fully separate itself from the physical reality of having life (and thereby present and represent something both different and more than what live actors can achieve), this does not mean that I oppose the existence of a style of puppetry that strives for the perfection of imitation. On the contrary, I believe that the continuation of such a practice is a valuable branch of the art form and an important means of keeping alive a colorful tradition of puppetry. Employing some characteristic tools of the imitative or realistic style can also prove beneficial in staging Shakespeare, especially when such tools are set within the framework of an otherwise highly stylized performance, as will be explained in the last two chapters. Furthermore, as someone specializing in the construction and manipulation of the most anthropomorphic of all puppets, the string marionette, I am not immune to the wonder of seeing figures acting in an uncannily human manner,¹¹⁴ and I admire the skill with which such realistic figures are constructed and manipulated. If artistic quality can be measured by the amount of attention given to details such as staging, music, lighting, props and background, the skill with which these puppets are constructed and manipulated, or the amount of work put into the creation of a marionette

¹¹³ It is enough to look at three notable marionette operas on show today in Europe (all three playing Mozart) to notice the striking differences in style: *Don Giovanni* in Prague (National Marionette Theatre), *The Magic Flute* in Salzburg (Salzburger Marionettentheater), and *The Emperor's Feast* (based on *Der Schauspieldirektor*) by Czech traveling company Teatro Karromato. Since one of the basic principles and also one of the main appeals of the genre of the marionette opera is constant reference to the idiosyncrasies of the live opera, this style of puppet theater will always require a high degree of imitation of the idiosyncrasies of the live stage. There are notable differences, however, in how this imitation is presented. The reference to the live opera can take the form of the mechanical copying of its style of acting and staging techniques, but the allusion to the original can also produce a creative interpretation or parody presented with the tools of puppetry. Karromato best represents the modern aesthetic described above by allowing their puppets, both in terms of design and manipulation, to enter the realm of the symbolic and follow the specific rules of puppetry rather than imitating the representational methods of the live stage, while maintaining a connection to the genre of the opera by constantly alluding to, caricaturing and commenting on the peculiarities of the style. The Salzburger Marionettentheater presents the other end of the spectrum where the puppets are constructed and manipulated in a manner following the best traditions of the Baroque marionette opera: these performances intend to create the perfect (perfection in the sense discussed above) illusion of watching live theater. The techniques used in Salzburg are among the best-guarded secrets of puppetry and regardless of whether or not one appreciates the intention of ‘perfect imitation’, the technical and artistic achievements of the Salzburger Marionettentheater are indisputable. The National Marionette Theater in Prague represents a middle ground between the two styles described above. They too maintain a very strong connection with the imitative traditions of the Baroque opera, but their performances also show the influence of the stylized, ‘non-realistic’ style of puppetry predominant in the Czech tradition since the 1930s (owing largely to the impact of the Pilsen Puppet Theatre, founded by Josef Skupa, one of the most significant Czech puppeteers and founder of the world-famous Spejbl and Hurvínek Theatre).

¹¹⁴ As McCormick points out, “The belief that a puppet might have a life of its own [...] relates to an audience’s desire to empathize even with what it knows to be a figure made out of inanimate materials” 5. All puppeteers realize and take advantage of this desire of the audience to imagine life; the difference between artists is mainly in whether their emphasis is on the similarities or rather the differences between man and puppet.

opera, for example, it is without a question that some of today's 'realistic' puppet shows are of the highest artistic standard.

I maintain, however, that in the context of Shakespearean adaptations for the puppet stage, the *creative* aspects of staging (as argued in Chapter 1) are equal in importance to the demands of artistic design and skillful manipulation. Unless the aim of a puppet production is the direct reference or allusion to a specific stage tradition, such as that of the opera, the yardstick for measuring artistic quality cannot be imitation. If a puppet performance imitates the live stage and thereby disregards one of the basic premises of the modern aesthetic of the puppet, summed up by Bill Baird who says "when puppets try to copy the human animal, they fail",¹¹⁵ it may also fail in providing any essential reason for using puppets instead of actors. In a 1913 collection of his observations about the theater, Russian theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold goes into detailed analysis about the difference between the puppet theater and live acting. He imagines the possibility of having puppets "look and behave like real men"¹¹⁶ and comes to the conclusion that there is little sense in doing so. As he says, "In his attempts to reproduce reality 'as it really is', he [the director] improves the puppets further and further until he arrives at a far simpler solution to the problem: replace the puppets with real men".¹¹⁷ In a similar vein, in her 1935 book *Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theater*, Russian puppeteer Nina Efimova takes Kleist's observations of the puppet being essentially different from live actors and Meyerhold's remarks about the senselessness of trying to perfectly imitate life with puppets, and states that "The puppet theater must not ever, ever be a miniature reproduction of the big theater, having its own laws made by its own conditions".¹¹⁸

Most of those puppet artists today who are not following some form of imitational tradition, such as that of the marionette opera (although as seen from the example of contemporary Czech marionette operas, even many of these artists have adopted aspects of the modern aesthetic of the puppet), have realized that puppetry can achieve its real heights in allowing the puppet, a symbolic representation of life to do what it can do best: to express that which is symbolic. This is why Tillis suggests a "conceptual approach" to puppetry where the puppet theater "uses abstracted signs of life of varied quality and limited quantity, realizing that true simulation is impossible" as opposed to "an imitative approach" which "uses abstracted signs of life in such quality and quantity as to simulate life as closely as

¹¹⁵ Bill Baird. *The Art of the Puppet*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1973. 16.

¹¹⁶ Vsevolod Meyerhold. *Meyerhold on Theatre*. London: A&C Black, 1969. 128.

¹¹⁷ Meyerhold 129.

¹¹⁸ Efimova 106.

possible”.¹¹⁹ This, while still allowing for individual differences in the treatment of realism and abstraction, seems to be the generally accepted principle in today’s puppet art.

Today the live theater is no longer necessarily “in accordance with natural laws”, and as such, it does not intrinsically oppose the basic principles of puppetry. After more than half a century of going their separate ways, of defining themselves against one another as that which is ‘live’ and that which is ‘inanimate’, the live theater and puppetry appear to have come closer to each other than ever before. Following an era of predominant realism it seems that the live stage has re-recognized what puppetry has known for most of its history: that an actor – although to a different degree than, and in a different manner from, the puppet – can never be anything else but symbolic and stylized, since the actor becoming ‘real’ would mean that French theater director Antonin Artaud’s impossible idea of a theater without representation, labeled as his ‘theater of cruelty’ could in fact be possible. The feasibility of such an idea of the semiotic closure of representation, however, is disproven by Derrida in his 1966 essay on Artaud, where he shows why “there is no theater in the world today which fulfills Artaud’s desire”.¹²⁰

The seemingly unbridgeable gap between the live stage and puppetry, set by the demand for a degree of realism essentially unattainable for either, as shown by Derrida, has all but disappeared, and the live theater has opened its doors to allow in many of the tools and methods of puppetry. There is now easy and frequent access between the two genres, as demonstrated by the work of a number of Hungarian theater directors, such as Róbert Alföldi, Ádám Horgas, Zoltán Balázs or László Bagossy who have recently tried their hand at directing puppet theater performances,¹²¹ or that of a number of puppet directors, such as Gábor Tengely, Ágnes Kuthy, András Veres or Kata Csató who have directed performances

¹¹⁹ Tillis 44.

¹²⁰ Derrida, Jacques. *The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation*. In: *Writing and Difference*, by Jacques Derrida. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, 313. Derrida argues that theater without representation, i.e. the “Closure of Representation” would be impossible, because Artaud’s theater of cruelty “is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable. Life is the nonrepresentable origin of representation” 295. Derrida explains that if Artaud’s concept were to be implemented, such a theater would exclude the possibility of “all non-sacred theater, [...] all theater of words, [...] all nonpolitical theater, [...] all ideological theater, all cultural theater, all communicative, interpretive [...] theater seeking to transmit a content, or to deliver a message” 307-310, which is basically all of theater as we know it. Philip Auslander notes in *Theory for Performance Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) that while deconstructing, and thereby demonstrating the impracticality of Artaud’s ideology Derrida also shows considerable appreciation for the theater of cruelty. As Auslander writes, “For Derrida, Artaud was a kind of tragic figure who sought but failed to escape the grip of western metaphysics [...] Derrida both admired Artaud’s confrontation with western tradition and emphasized the impossibility of his project” 94.

¹²¹ Alföldi: *Sade márki 120 napja*, Budapest Bábszínház, 2008; Horgas: *Lear Király*, Atlantis Társulat, 2004; Balázs: *A hattyúk tava*, Budapest Bábszínház, 2011; Bagossy: *Völgyhíd*, Kolibri Színház, 2010.

for the live stage.¹²² Many of the performances created by these directors mix the realms of puppetry and live acting with professionals from both worlds working side by side. In Budapest there are a number of currently running performances that manage to present a successful combination of puppetry and live acting, such as *The Skriker (Az iglic)* by Caryl Churchill in the co-production of the Katona József Theater and the Budapest Puppet Theater, directed by Gábor Tengely; *King John (János király)* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt in Örkény Theater, directed by László Bagossy; or nearly the complete repertory of Kolibri Theater (a theater known and acclaimed for its use of mixed techniques).¹²³ One of the most interesting examples of employing the now shared techniques of puppetry and the live stage, however, is to be found in one of the most successful adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* of the new millennium. Although it does not feature any puppets, nor does it proclaim any connection to the puppet theater, *És Rómeó és Júlia (And Romeo and Juliet)*, directed by Ádám Horgas nevertheless showcases some of the most basic tools of puppetry in a subtle but very definite manner. This production is an excellent example of how the methods of puppetry have become applicable on the live stage even in performances that, at first glance, have no connection with puppetry.

2.2. *Romeo and Juliet*

By giving ever more room to symbolism and abstraction, theater directors have recognized the need for incorporating novel tools of representation into the established repertory of the live stage. New ideas call for new solutions, and many of these solutions were, and still are, borrowed from the world of puppetry. Exemplifying the use of these shared tools of puppetry and the live stage are two internationally acclaimed adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*: a puppet theater co-production of Czech theater Divadlo Drak and Japanese puppet artist Noriyuki Sawa and the Hungarian *És Rómeó és Júlia*, directed by Ádám Horgas. Although the two performances are quite different in many respects – while the protagonists in one are puppets, the other features actors; one gives more importance to visual representation whereas the other focuses more on the text; one uses an array of puppets,

¹²² Cf. Tengely: *Csongor és Tünde*, Nemzeti Színház; Kuthy: *A padlás*, Bartók Kamaraszínház és Művészetek Háza, 2013; Veres: *Hódítások könyve*, Zsámbéki Színházi és Művészeti Bázis, 2012; Csató: *Keresztanya*, Orlai Produkciós Iroda, 2010.

¹²³ International examples of the highly successful blending of the two worlds include, among others, *The Tempest* at The Little Angel Theatre as a co-production with the Royal Shakespeare Company or the immensely popular puppet musical *Avenue-Q* by Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx, now in theaters all over the world.

props and scenery while the other is played out on an empty stage with barely any props – on closer inspection one can find a number of common points in their methods of adaptation.

The Czech-Japanese interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet*, entitled *A Plague O'Both Your Houses!!!* is the story of two defenseless, manipulated people. Their identity, their personality is secondary to their roles in a predestined story. Everything and everybody is merely a part of the mechanism that moves the story towards the final outcome. It does not matter who is who; it only matters that things happen as they are supposed to happen. Thus, the characters are faceless; all they have is their unavoidable fate. And they seem to accept this to the extent that it is the young lovers themselves who move the chain of events forward. This is something novel in Divadlo Drak's *Romeo and Juliet*. We are used to interpretations where two innocent children are driven to perdition by the outside world, while the young lovers struggle against the pressure of society.¹²⁴ This aspect is also present in the Czech production, but as their destiny is engraved into the depths of their souls, the lovers themselves become a part of the external circumstances that push them towards the final outcome. Everything and everybody promoting this outcome is also within *Romeo and Juliet* and this concept, as we shall see, appears as a physical reality in this production. In the performance the players put on masks: the mask of a Friend, a Friar, a Nurse, a Mother. The play begins with the scene where Romeo, Mercutio and their company put on masks when entering the Capulets' house.

The opening lines are Mercutio's: "Give me a case to put my visage in: A visor for a visor!" (1.4.29). The performance is about changing faces and hiding. Hiding is an integral element of the art of puppetry, but here it is not only the manipulators who are concealed¹²⁵ but also the puppets. They hide behind the conventions of a Japanese rite performed in masks. This identity with a mask is well known in Japanese literature and mythology: there are stories in which the mask becomes the face itself, and when it is torn away, the bare flesh is revealed. Without the mask one loses his face as well. What is the significance of the lack of identity in the Czech performance? Everyone in the play, be it a Capulet or a Montague,

¹²⁴ Cf. Zefirelli's 1968 film version or Susan Snyder's interpretation of the play in *Shakespeare – A Wayward Journey*. University of Delaware Press, 2002. (19-28).

¹²⁵ Hiding is a prominent theme in puppetry even when the puppeteer is clearly visible together with the puppet. In such cases it is not the scenery or a hood that conceals the puppeteer but his or her own mode of performance. Hiding, thus, does not necessarily mean remaining unseen but rather staying in the background and being noticed only when this is the intention of the puppeteer. This mode of performance allows the puppeteer to play with the attention of the audience, directing it on or away from himself, communicating with the puppet or with the audience behind the puppet. Staying hidden in such a manner even when in plain sight is one of the most unique tools of puppetry, one that the live stage does not possess. This tool foregrounds some important questions of early modern drama: who is the prime mover and can we ever understand his methods?

always does what he or she believes is best. They fight when they feel it is fair to fight; they help their friends when a friend needs help; they love their loved ones and hate their enemies. No one ever does anything that is morally questionable, and thus, no one ever has to take responsibility for their actions, or for the lack thereof. Everybody is part of a homogeneous mass that pushes the lovers towards their fate. It does not matter who is a Capulet and who is a Montague; they are interchangeable. Would Sampson and Gregory not hate Tybalt if they happened to *be* servants to Montague? Would Abraham and Balthasar not love Tybalt, were they *not* servants to Montague? These are decent, honest people; some of them a bit rash, true, but each and every one of them loyal and acting in all good faith.

És Rómeó és Júlia, performed by actor Péter Rudolf and actress Eszter Nagy-Kálózy, also makes use of the interchangeable quality of the characters. The fact that two actors are playing a minimum of twelve roles calls for the necessity of giving two, three, four roles to each player. Here, however, not only do the players take on multiple roles, but the roles themselves are also doubled, i.e. some roles, like that of Mercutio, Benvolio, Friar Laurence and a number of others are played alternately by the actors. In most cases the changing of roles evolves from situations where three or more people should be on stage at the same time. There are, however, moments when it is not merely a technical necessity to jump in and out of roles. Such a scene is the one where Friar Laurence weds the lovers. When the Friar addresses Romeo, he is played by Eszter Nagy-Kálózy, and when he speaks to Juliet, Péter Rudolf becomes the monk. But when he speaks to both children, he is echoed by both actors, giving a common voice to the common thoughts of boy, girl and priest.

Scenes where two actors are playing three-four roles simultaneously call for innovative solutions. It is a convention of the puppet world that a character can be represented by a prop, an object. Spectators might not realize it, but when a pair of glasses start to function as Benvolio without anyone wearing them, they are entering the world of object animation. This unconscious acceptance of the tools of puppetry is a crucial point in the performance: if a director decides to mix techniques, the audience should not have to 'trip over the threshold' between the genres. In *És Rómeó és Júlia* the transition is seamless: once one of the actors takes over a role, the audience accepts the abstraction of figures. The actor will become a character when using a certain stage property, and as a next step, the props themselves will start to represent characters. As Keir Elam writes in *Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*,

there is no fixed law governing the customary representation of the dramatis persona by the human actor: if what matters is that something real is able to

assume this function, the actor is not necessarily a man; it can be a puppet, or a machine.¹²⁶

It does not matter who is in the given costume because we accept that the costume itself is the character. Pushing the limits of accepting conventions to the extremes is characteristic of the puppet theater, and even if one is not aware of it, the audience is witnessing the workings of puppet conventions on the stage of the live theater. Thus, a pair of glasses will become Benvolio; thumb and index finger rounded in front of an eye like a monocle will always mean Tybalt; and a bonnet, regardless of the person wearing it or whether anyone is wearing it at all, will be the Nurse. It would be a feeble argument to propose that these moments are mere by-products of necessity. It is a concept of the performance to demonstrate that there is no need for a third, fourth, fifth player. Everyone else but Romeo and Juliet can be replaced, substituted. Everything revolves around the lovers, and it is only *their* personality that is not interchangeable.

The Czech performance also raises the fundamental questions of loss of personality and the delicate quality of character, with the addition of another ingredient always present in the puppet theater: manipulation (in both the sense of actors manipulating the puppets and characters manipulating each other). It is not by coincidence that Jozef Krofta, director of Divadlo Drak turned his attention from traditional Czech puppetry to Japanese theater when working on *Romeo and Juliet*. European puppet theater has always emphasized the importance of character. Traditional European techniques, such as glove puppets, rod puppets or string marionettes are generally animated/manipulated by a single actor, which means that each puppet obtains its personality, and its intentions from its one and only animator. Personality is largely inviolable; characters are usually not interchangeable. In oriental traditions, on the other hand, individual acting and characterization are less central aspects of a puppet performance than are group work and harmonious cooperation in manipulation.

In the production of Divadlo Drak, puppet master Noriyuky Sawa choreographed the animators' movements according to the best traditions of *Bunraku*, a Japanese theatrical style that combines puppetry with mime, dance and music. The art of Bunraku has its roots in the 17th century, in a time when Japanese theater enjoyed prosperity and popularity, and is based on the perfect cooperation of a group of actors animating a single figure. In order to achieve this harmony, the players have to sacrifice their own personalities and create a united persona for the puppet. In traditional Bunraku theater there used to be a strict hierarchy amongst the

¹²⁶ Keir Elam. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. London and NY: Taylor & Francis, 2002. 12.

players. The master puppeteer would move the head and the right hand, his oldest apprentice (or son) the left hand, and a younger student the feet. Recent trends, however, tend to loosen these ancient traditions. This way the individuals cooperating and collaborating towards the animation of a figure become interchangeable. This is precisely what the performance plays with: the animators constantly change places and roles, and because of this, the characters of the puppets become less conceivable.¹²⁷ If the soul of a puppet is the actor behind it, then these puppets have multiple and transposable souls, and consequently they themselves come to be transposable and are *free* to become anyone and everyone else. At the same time, however, if the intention of the puppet is granted by the intention of the manipulator behind it, then multiple and transposable intentions are forced upon these figures, and consequently they are *compelled* to become anyone and everyone else.¹²⁸

It is arguable which is more tragic: to die in consequence of one's own decisions, or to be driven towards one's end by unavoidable circumstances. The two performances of *Romeo and Juliet* have taken different views in this respect; however, their approach toward the treatment of the genre of tragedy shows some important similarities. Both productions understand that today it is extremely difficult to stage a tragedy because, as George Steiner argues in *The Death of Tragedy*, "the triumph of rationalism and a secular worldview has removed the metaphysical grounds for tragedy in the modern world".¹²⁹ In other words, accepting the existence of tragedy would mean that we allow for the possibility of some inexplicable power in the world that is beyond our control. "Modern man [...] with his sciences and skeptical reason has conquered his superstitious belief in the unseen realm",¹³⁰ says Steiner. Modern man will have no such notions as *unavoidable end* or *uncontrollable*

¹²⁷ In her introduction to *Theatre of Animation – Contemporary Adult Puppet Plays in Context* (Contemporary Theatre Review 9.4 (1999)) editor Marion Baraitser explains that all elements of Bunraku (movement, music, song and speech) are of equal importance to the overall effect, and quotes Jan Kott who describes Bunraku as "evoking absolute illusion and its equally absolute destruction" 8. Kott highlights the self-reflexive nature of Bunraku when he writes "Bunraku is simultaneously a theatre in which puppets act human drama—and a metatheatre whose protagonists are the manipulators operating the puppets, the narrator and the musician—a metatheatre, whose dramatic action consists in revealing the theatrical illusion" 8. Roland Barthes also emphasizes the metatheatricality of the form in his essay *On Bunraku* when he writes "In Western theatre, the actor pretends to act, but his acts are never anything but gestures; onstage, there is only theatre, and ashamed theatre at that. Bunraku, though (by definition), separates act from gesture: it shows the gesture, allows the act to be seen, exposes art and work simultaneously and reserves for each its own script" (Roland Barthes, "On Bunraku," *TDR* 15, no. 2 (1971): 76-80.)

¹²⁸ This is reminiscent of Diderot's view of actors. According to him actors are morally neutral entities, "fit to play all characters because they have none" (Diderot 1883: 65, qtd. in Shepherd and Wallis 225). Diderot also claims that because of this, "a great actor is also a most ingenious puppet" 225. This suggests that multiple and transposable souls may work in both directions and by manipulating the puppets in an interchangeable manner, the actors in this production may have achieved Diderot's ideal and become "most ingenious puppets" themselves.

¹²⁹ George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*. London: Faber and Faber, 1990. 293.

¹³⁰ Steiner 293.

circumstances. Or if he will, they must be presented to him in some digestible form, like that of irony or grotesque. It is interesting to note that we often prefer to see something turned upside-down and inside-out to anything that is plain and simply tragic. In today's theater, it is a frequent phenomenon that tragic effect on stage turns against the best intentions of the unsuspecting director and becomes comical. If too much is shown, the effect becomes ridiculous, as it often does in productions of *Titus Andronicus*, *King Lear* or even of *Hamlet*. The audience starts laughing as a counter reaction because so much harsh, realistic cruelty, blood, spilled entrails and pain cannot be taken seriously.

Consequently, both adaptations realize the need to elevate the play to something that is still viable after the death of tragedy; however, there is a significant difference in the way the two performances relate to the *tragic*. The Czech performance emphasizes the senselessness in tragedy by turning it into its own parody. The main characteristics of many good Shakespeare puppet adaptations are the qualities of irony, grotesque and nonsense exactly because these traits elevate the dramatic material to a level where tragedy and comedy both turn nonsensical. Moments that have moved audiences to tears for hundreds of years may become comical. After all, we are not watching a nineteenth-century melodrama, and we are too proud and cynical, and at the same time often too ashamed to feel sorry lest we reveal our real emotions. This kind of alienation, distaste and cynicism towards the tragic may be one of the reasons why the Czech production has taken the route of moving away from the straightforward tragic ending towards a kind of satire where we are given the chance to laugh instead of feeling sorrow. In this performance we laugh at the jests of the players, who sometimes perform incredible shows of acrobatic skills. We laugh at the puppet Romeo, who is literally taken apart and reconstructed after his 'eternal' love with Rosa. We laugh, although we know we are witnessing the death and resurrection of a boy who is reborn a man only to die again. He grows up, but even this growing is comic as he fumbles on stilts to reach Juliet on the balcony. This is the most grotesque moment of the performance: overhead the most famous love scene in world literature is taking place while underneath four people are desperately trying to harmonize their movements while balancing a puppet on six foot-long poles. Finally everything is in place, Romeo reaches the balcony, faces Juliet – and has to realize that Juliet is only a silhouette against a screen. Romeo is a puppet and so is Juliet, but being in different dimensions (Romeo a three dimensional rod puppet and Juliet a two dimensional shadow) they can never actually come into physical contact with each other. The audience is left with the choice whether to laugh at the irony or cry over their tragic fate. Both options are open.

While twisting the tragedy into a grotesque, bitterly humorous parody, Divadlo Drak manages to maintain a feeling of uneasy anxiety in spectators. We are laughing and having a good time, but somewhere deep down we feel the weight of what we are witnessing. The production achieves this effect with extremely strong stage tension. In traditional interpretations of *Romeo and Juliet*, all the time we are hoping that Balthasar will not hurry so much with his message; that Romeo will arrive a minute later; that Juliet will wake a minute earlier. On the stage we find characters desperately trying to go against the unavoidable end: this is one of the main sources of tension. Quite shockingly then, in Divadlo Drak's performance we are thrown back by the frustrating coolness with which all the players seem to know and accept that there is no other end than what we all fear: murder, banishment, misunderstanding, miscalculation, suicide and finally sorrow. This cynical acceptance of the inevitable outcome is the source of a different, less comfortable, but equally strong stage tension.

The irony, sarcasm and uneasy tension of the performance do not give way to genuine sorrow. True, we have just witnessed the death of two ill-fated children, but we were laughing all the way through. Besides, in this production even the definiteness of death becomes questionable. After all, we have seen Romeo literally torn apart and reconstructed, and we have seen Juliet literally become a shadow of herself and regain her original physical form. It seems, however, that once the story is over, there is no resurrection. The puppets are left on stage without anyone manipulating them, and even though it was manipulation that had led to their destruction, without their manipulators, the puppets are dead. At the end of the performance, it is hard to decide what one feels. It is some strange mixture of bitterness and shame.¹³¹ After all, how can we be so insensitive to have had a genuinely good time when what we have just witnessed was undoubtedly tragic?¹³²

The Hungarian *És Rómeó és Júlia* deals with tragedy in an entirely different manner: it meets tragedy head-on. The lines are spoken as they had been written, the cycle of events follows that of the script, and, although the text is abridged, the performance follows the original dramaturgy. This adaptation does not choose to paraphrase, allegorize or mock tragic

¹³¹ The mixed emotions one may have after seeing such a performance are in great part due to the nature of the puppet theater that allows it to achieve aesthetic effect by transcending the boundaries of traditional genres. As Penny Francis observes, "a puppet is a natural transgressor, entering where no human dares" 14.

¹³² The performance is in complete accordance with what Steiner says about the function of tragedy: "tragic drama must start from the fact of catastrophe. Tragedies end badly. The tragic personage is broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence. This again is crucial. Where the causes of disaster are temporal, where the conflict can be resolved through technical or social means, we may have serious drama, but not tragedy" 14.

effect. It simply does not give a chance for tragic affect to overstep the mark and become melodramatic. In fact, it almost does not give a chance for tragic affect to be tragic, either. The story is presented at such a pace that there is no time to stop and gaze with starry-eyed romanticism. Even the most poetic scenes, such as the balcony scene played beautifully with genuine intuition, are ‘killed’ before they start to take effect, and we suddenly find ourselves in the next scene, played by the same two people. We are not even given a chance to be sincerely moved by the poetry because Juliet, right after saying “parting is such sweet sorrow” (2.3.200), will turn on her heel and say “God pardon sin! wast thou with Rosaline?” (2.3.47). Of course, that is not Juliet speaking any more but Friar Laurence played by the same person, without any visible transition. These transitions are made smooth by the consistent use of the tools of puppetry and it is this consistency which creates an appreciable system in the constant shifting of roles, which could otherwise lead to chaos. This is a very clever way to disguise tragedy: throughout we are spared the discomfort of having to feel touched too deeply because of the speed with which events follow one another. At the very end of the play, however, there is nothing that can spare the audience from being moved.¹³³ There is no sudden shift, no hint of the playful manner of turning poetic moments around. Unexpectedly, we are left in the dark with all the poetry and emotion of the past ninety minutes slowly settling in. The creators of the performance had realized that it is pointless to speak again after the final words of Romeo. Although Shakespeare had written a full 140 lines of explanations, lamentations and conclusions, the dramatic high point of the play is unquestionably when Juliet dies. In the Hungarian production Juliet kills herself without a word, and the rest is absolute and indisputable silence. The long seconds of silence in complete darkness before people start to applaud shows that tragedy may be dead, but occasionally its spirit can be summoned. We only need to find forms in which the twenty-first century spectator will not reject its reality. Forms, such as the ones puppetry can provide.¹³⁴

¹³³ Steiner in *The Death of Tragedy* addresses the modern, ambivalent standpoint on the ‘tragic’ and our own difficulties of accepting the notion, but he does not claim that it is impossible to present tragedy today. The ‘death of tragedy’ for him does not mean the impossibility of performing, but rather that of writing tragedy after the 17th century. He asks “Could a man write the word “tragedy” across a blank page without hearing at his back the immense presence of the Oresteia, of Oedipus, of Hamlet, and of King Lear?” 33. As opposed to writing tragedy, presenting it is not necessarily impossible, as demonstrated by Steiner’s summary of the three main points of his argument: “that tragedy is, indeed, dead; that it carries on in its essential tradition despite changes in technical form; and, lastly, that tragic drama might come back to life [...] there should be present to our minds the possibility—though I judge it remote—that the tragic theatre may have before it a new life and future” 244-45

¹³⁴ My conclusion that a number of tools for presenting the tragic today may be found in the world of puppetry is in harmony with Steiner’s own conclusion, wherein he allows that “the curve of tragedy is, perhaps, unbroken” (245) if one finds the way in which one’s own time allows for its existence. Steiner concludes: “perhaps, tragedy

2.3. Conclusion

This chapter set out to explain some essential differences as well as similarities between the live theater and the puppet stage in order to, on the one hand, establish puppetry as an independent medium with its own rules and methods of representation and, on the other hand, demonstrate how the tools and methodology of puppetry can prove productive in the specific case of adaptations of Shakespeare's plays to the puppet stage. In differentiating between the tools of puppetry and the live stage I proposed that the essential difference is in the very existence of the actor versus the puppet, because (1) while the *puppet represents life*, the *actor is life*, but (2) whereas the actor *represents a character*, the puppet *is the character*. In connection with the nature of the actor and the puppet I also discussed the ambivalent question of realistic and abstract representation in the inherently symbolic medium of the puppet theater.

As was shown through the analysis of two productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, one on the live stage and the other a puppet adaptation, the qualities that distinguish the puppet from the actor puppetry can elevate the dramatic material to a level where tragedy turns nonsensical and becomes a bitterly humorous parody. At the same time, a puppet theater adaptation of the play, while mocking tragic effect, can also emphasize the weight of the tragedy with extremely strong stage tension. Thus, as it was emphasized, the puppet theater has certain methods with which it can present a Shakespearean tragedy, which strongly set it apart from the traditions of live theater.

Despite the innate differences between the two genres, some live theater productions have recently started to borrow and learn from the tools of puppetry as demonstrated by a number of mixed genre performances created by directors of the puppet theater as well as the live stage. Today there are examples of the live stage applying recognizable techniques of puppetry when dealing with abstract and symbolic themes. The success of performances employing the now shared tools of the live stage and the puppet theater provides a further insight into the ways in which puppetry and Shakespeare may be brought together to produce a successful adaptation.

has merely altered in style and convention" 245. My own claim is that the challenges presented by these altered styles and conventions are well answered by puppetry.

The next chapter will look at three adaptations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and examine how each version manages to create its own interpretation of the play using the tools of puppetry.

Chapter 3. The words of *Hamlet*

In this chapter I will examine one of the most famous adaptations, at least of the past fourteen years, of *Hamlet* produced for the puppet stage, with the aim of explaining how an almost entirely nonverbal performance can claim to be an adaptation of Shakespeare's play. *No Exit – A Hamlet Fantasy* is the one-man show of German puppet artist Michael Vogel, directed by Frank Soehnle. Charlotte Wilde, co-author and co-producer, provides the music from a corner of the stage with an electric guitar, but she does not interact with either the puppeteer or the puppets. Vogel is actor and puppeteer, protagonist and manipulator at the same time, playing two-three roles simultaneously. As I will argue, this production, rather than performing the plot of the drama, presents an adaptation of some of the major themes of the play in the interpretation of a puppeteer and as such, it is representative of the use of many of the most effective tools of puppetry. I will mainly focus on the internal logic of the performance and its interpretation of some of the most iconic¹³⁵ elements of the drama. In addition, in order to demonstrate how *Exit* (as the production is referred to in the world of puppetry) differs in its methodology from other performances, I will contrast a number of its techniques with those of two other internationally acclaimed adaptations of *Hamlet*: the verbal production of the State Puppet Theater of Plovdiv, featuring actors and puppets on the stage; and the entirely nonverbal glove puppet version of Australian-born British dancer, mime artist and puppeteer, Nola Rae. As I will argue, the main difference between the three productions is in the way they each perceive and present those elements of the drama that audiences will universally recognize as representative of Shakespeare's most famous tragedy. I will show that while the British and Bulgarian versions both use these characteristic properties and iconic images to create a condensed tragicomic version of the plot, *Exit* is more interested in the nature and characteristics of the protagonists than in the plot of the play and works with those moments of the drama that point to our understanding of the personal tragedy of each player.

3.1. *Hamlet* outside its text

In Chapter 2 I quoted Steve Tillis who, when speaking about puppet theater adaptations of Shakespearean plays asks why a production should “choose to employ puppets,

¹³⁵ The word “iconic” is used here not in its strict semiotic meaning but in the sense of being recognizable and integral to the play, character or theme it refers to.

and the audience desire to see puppets, if the drama is known to work perfectly well with actors”.¹³⁶ The chapter provided a partial answer to the question, arguing that much is to be gained by the audience’s recognition of the fundamental differences between the representational tools of puppet and actor. This, however, does not provide a comprehensive explanation for the existence of such productions. However interesting the paradox of the “object with life”¹³⁷ may be, this phenomenon in itself is insufficient in providing either the justification or the means for producing a puppet theater adaptation of a Shakespearean play. *Hamlet*, as the longest play and containing the lengthiest and most famous soliloquies of all the oeuvre seems especially problematic for the primarily visual and action-based art form of the puppet theater and, thus, the question whether the audience may gain anything from seeing an adaptation that omits most of the Shakespearean text and completely rearranges the dramaturgy of the play is more than relevant.

The objective of the current chapter will be to explain, through the analysis of a world-renowned production, what it is that one may expect to gain from such a performance. Before proceeding with the analysis of the performance, however, I will first try to answer two questions that may (and often do) arise in connection with puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare. The first question is whether a primarily visual performance that omits most of the dramatic text may be labeled as an adaptation of Shakespeare without somehow ‘defacing’ the ideal of the original. Although, as argued in Chapter 2, after Barthes there should be no point in speaking about a single ‘original’ nor should there be any need to address the seemingly outdated expectation of ‘fidelity to an original’, the fact that there is still a very palpable expectation from many critics and directors today of being faithful to an ideal of ‘the original’¹³⁸ when it comes to adapting classical masterpieces, does not allow the creator of an

¹³⁶ Tillis 42.

¹³⁷ Tillis 65.

¹³⁸ Characteristic of such a viewpoint is what Fernando Poyatos writes in *Textual Translation and Live Translation: The Total Experience of Nonverbal Communication in Literature, Theater and Cinema* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008) where he claims that “the only film adaptations [of classical works] worth taking into consideration are the least compromising ones, in other words, those that, through faithfulness to the original literary work, can only benefit its readers”¹³². Among these ‘benefits’ he lists “preserving the chronology of the narrative, without altering the writer’s planned interrelationships between and among its various parts” and “reproducing as much as possible the characters’ dialogues”. Poyatos’ argument is but a modernized version of the concerns Maynard Mack expresses in his 1966 book *King Lear in Our Time*, where he writes “The director and (possibly) actor are encouraged to assume the same level of authority as the author. The sound notion that there is a life to which words give life can with very little stretching be made to mean that the words the author set down are themselves simply a search for the true play, which the director must intuit in, through, and under them. Once he has done so, the words become to a degree expendable [...] In the hands of many directors in today’s theater, where the director is a small God, subtext easily becomes a substitute for text and a license for total directorial subjectivity” (qtd. in Marowitz 8). Interestingly, it is precisely what Maynard Mack considers dangerous, that seems to be the most important tool and possibility for the puppet theater today: looking for and working with the subtext instead of the text itself. If

adaptation to simply dismiss such concerns. The second, and much more relevant question I will address is whether there is anything a puppet theater adaptation of Shakespeare can add to the experience of the audience by producing something entirely different from the traditional interpretations of the play. I would also like to reiterate, at the same time, that the examination of such questions of mediality and adaptation may contribute to our deeper understanding of theatrical representation in general, and the representational questions thematized in Shakespearean drama in particular – that is, semiotic problems which are at stake in the present dissertation.

Concern over damaging an ‘original masterpiece’ by altering the text or the dramaturgy in a performance and labeling it an *adaptation of the original*, is expressed by Maynard Mack, Fernando Poyatos, Kenneth Branagh (to be discussed later), and a number of other authors, actors and directors.¹³⁹ Although Kidnie, quoting theater critic and playwright Nicholas de Jongh, explains that “Adaptation is not like defacing a painting, a permanent act of vandalism: the plays will always be there”¹⁴⁰, what these authors refer to when they stand up for the ‘integrity of the text’ is, of course, not the fear of seeing the dramatic text physically damaged, but the worry that repeated reworkings and adaptations of a play may eventually render the original work meaningless. I would argue, however, that rather than depriving them of their meaning, it is the creativity of theatrical producers that keeps dramatic texts alive, by giving them significance in a time and social environment entirely different from that in which they were written. As Marowitz comments, “If the word ‘classic’ has any meaning at all it must refer to a work which is able to mean again, and perhaps mean something else”¹⁴¹, and thus, it is the continual process of adaptation that guarantees the survival of classical texts.

one strives to produce a performance which claims to be faithful to the original, it is a highly contentious question to what exactly one should be faithful. As Kidnie says, “it is impossible, without recourse to wholly arbitrary assertions of boundaries and limits, to determine with certainty [...] when a particular textual or theatrical instance is no longer a genuine instance of the work” 31 and in another discussion she concludes that “precisely what constitutes authentic Shakespeare is a question that can never finally be resolved since there is no a priori category that texts and stagings are productions of” 9. It therefore seems that arguing against the creative freedom of directors in favor of protecting the authentic or genuine work is not only outdated but also unfounded.

¹³⁹ Similar views, arguing, in one way or another, against the theater’s right to interpret, cut, emend and rearrange Shakespeare’s works is to be found in the works of a number of directors, critics and scholars, including Harley Granville-Barker “Alas, Poor Will.” *Listener*, 3 March 1936: 387-9, 425-6.; Alfred Harbage *Theatre for Shakespeare*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955, 18-22, 77.; Maynard Mack *Everybody’s Shakespeare: reflections chiefly on the tragedies*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993, 1-68.; John Peter ‘Bloodbath at the RSC.’ *Sunday Times* (Culture), 18 November 2001.; Michael D. Friedman “In Defense of Authenticity.” *Studies in Philology*, 99.1 (2002): 33-56.; and Anthony Grafton *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990, 36-68.

¹⁴⁰ Kidnie 1.

¹⁴¹ Marowitz 7.

Marowitz not only allows for the freedom of the director, but also states that it is the director's obligation to deviate from any supposed intention of the author. He writes:

A director [...] who chains himself to unwavering fidelity to the author and pursues his work in selfless devotion to the 'meaning of the text' is unknowingly abdicating a director's responsibility. Since the only way to express an author's meaning is to filter it through the sensibility of those artists charged with communicating it, 'fidelity' is really a high-sounding word for 'lack of imaginative output'.¹⁴²

Fidelity to the author is something that can never be measured, proven or disproven, only debated, questioned or admired. Creative output, by contrast, is the principal element of any theater performance and, as Marowitz explains, it will always be tested: "An actor or director [...] tests his theories before audiences, and they not only can be proven, they are obliged to be – and when they are not, they suffer humiliation and disgrace".¹⁴³ Imaginative output is one of the most fundamental elements of the theater and a reasonable expectation on the part of the audience. The director is not the mouthpiece of the author since the author does not need a mouthpiece: the text is and will remain there to speak for itself. Or, as Kathleen L. Brown in *Teaching literary theory using film adaptations* writes in her discussion of "the doctrine of fidelity",¹⁴⁴ "if you want fidelity, read the original".¹⁴⁵ The role of the director then, rather than attempting to reproduce anything she perceives as the 'original', is to sift ideas through her own thoughts, beliefs and knowledge and produce a creative interpretation of the given play.

The second, and much more serious, question the creators of a puppet theater adaptation will have to be able to answer is whether there is anything a performance producing something entirely different from the traditional interpretations of the work can add to the experience of the audience. In answer to this question Marowitz says the following:

What we most want from Shakespeare today is not the routine repetition of his words and imagery, but the *Shakespearean experience*, and, ironically, that can come only from dissolving the works into a new compound – that is, creating that sense of vicissitude, variety and intellectual vigor with which the author himself confronted his own time.¹⁴⁶

There may always be those who want just that: "the routine repetition of Shakespeare's words and imagery", but Marowitz is probably right in that this is not the general expectation. In the

¹⁴² Marowitz 3.

¹⁴³ Marowitz 72.

¹⁴⁴ Kathleen L. Brown, *Teaching literary theory using film adaptations* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009.) 1.

¹⁴⁵ Brown 1.

¹⁴⁶ Marowitz 31.

theater, we, the audience, thoroughly enjoy watching the greatness of heroes (generally recognizing them as symbols of our own greatness) and the fallibility of the weak ones (happily seeing them as caricatures of our neighbors) because we are looking for those properties of the theater that speak to us through our understanding of being human. The fact that the theater can achieve this effect in various ways means that there is no single right solution for presenting any of the themes one may be interested in. Reciting the text is not the only method of grasping the dramatic content of a play: as has been explicated by theater semiotics, even the live stage has a range of means other than words for communicating a message, such as the use of scenery, props, costumes, and especially the metacommunicative tools employed by the actors, such as posture, movement, gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice.

3.2. The idiom of the puppet stage II.

As was shown in Chapter 2, puppetry is an art form based on images and movement and is therefore more suitable for conveying a message in visual signs than in words. The puppet theater, of course, can and often does convey information through verbal signs, as it is clear from the way Steve Tillis, one of the most influential theoreticians of the puppet theater today, describes the semiotics of the puppet.¹⁴⁷ He talks about three types of signs that “make up, or constitute, the puppet: signs of design, of movement, and of speech”.¹⁴⁸ It is important to note, however, that he does not assign equal importance to all three signs. His definition of the puppet is the following:

A theatrical figure, perceived by an audience to be an object, that is given design, movement, and frequently, speech, so that it fulfills the audience’s desire to imagine it as having life.¹⁴⁹

With the addition of the word ‘frequently’, Tillis allows for the possibility of omitting speech from a puppet performance. In fact, as he later explains, the reason he includes the sign of speech in his definition at all is to distinguish the puppet from other moving objects, such as props, costumes and masks because while these “can be given movement, they are not, and

¹⁴⁷ Henryk Jurkowski in *Aspects of Puppet Theatre*, Steve Tillis in *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet*, Michael Meschke in *In search of aesthetics for the puppet theatre*, Scott Cutler Shershow in *Puppets and “Popular” culture*, and John Bell in *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects at the End of the Century* talk about “the semiotics of the puppet” when discussing the signs of communication. Jurkowski, Shershow and Bell comment that the puppet theater places greater emphasis on visual signs than on the signs of spoken language.

¹⁴⁸ Tillis 7.

¹⁴⁹ Tillis 65.

cannot be, given speech, in that any speech associated with them is simply the speech of the actor or dancer who wears them”.¹⁵⁰

Although the three basic signs of design, movement and speech are also the basic constituents of the live theater, it is the order of their significance that distinguishes the two genres. While speech is only a complementary tool of puppetry, on the dramatic stage it is the spoken word that generally serves as the main channel of communication. At the same time, movement (of the actors) and design (of the make-up, costumes, props and scenery) are only optional elements that *may* become important means of communication in many cases, but are *not inherently essential* to a live theater performance. Any live stage performance can decide to omit the use of props, scenery or costumes and even movement, and build its communication exclusively on the sign of speech. Although the spectator of such a performance will surely benefit from the gestures and facial expressions of the actor and the atmosphere of the space in which the performance takes place, the event will effectively function as theater play and audio drama at the same time. Such a performance can be recorded and published as an audio book without significant editing, and will be fully enjoyable as such.¹⁵¹ The existence of the genre of the radio play or audio drama (performances created for the purpose of being listened to) further indicates that on the live stage it is possible to perform a play without the use of visual elements.¹⁵²

As was explained by Tillis, the puppet theater is in a very different position, where speech, as opposed to design and movement, is not an essential requirement because speech is not inherent *to the puppet itself*. Interestingly, Aristotle in his *Politics* uses the sign of speech to distinguish man from any other living being, and this becomes especially relevant in the context of the puppet theater where the audience accepts the puppet as an object with life, a living being which, nevertheless, is not a replica of man. Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer* provides the “metaphysical definition of man” as “the living being who has language”¹⁵³ and quotes Aristotle who says

Among living beings, only man has language. The voice is the sign of pain and pleasure, and this is why it belongs to other living beings [...]. But language is for manifesting the fitting and the unfitting and the just and the unjust. To have the sensation of the good and the bad and of the just and the unjust is what is proper to men as opposed to other living beings.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Tillis 78.

¹⁵¹ Such a performance recorded and now available as an audio book is *Azt meséld el, Pista!* performed by Pál Mácsay in Örkény Színház, Budapest.

¹⁵² See the complete BBC Radio Shakespeare, for example.

¹⁵³ Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer* 6.

¹⁵⁴ Qtd in Agamben 6.

The puppet, if accepted as representing life or even as living on stage, is rather like an animal in this sense because no matter how perfect its likeness to man, it will always lack the most integral sign of life: that of speech. The *sign of design*, in contrast, is the one and only integral element of the puppet, since it is part of the puppet itself even outside performance, that is, even without the puppet being animated by being given movement and/or speech. Puppetry makes use of the capacity of the graphic or fine arts for expressing complex metaphors, allegories or entire stories through visual signs, and as such, it can produce creations of the fine arts. *Design* in the puppet theater, in the broader sense, includes not only the design of the puppet, but of the scenery and props, as well, and a finely sculpted head, a masterfully painted face or background or a skillfully sewn costume can easily have the expressive strength of a painting. And like a painting, without the sign of design the puppet theater simply cannot exist.¹⁵⁵

Yet design in itself does not make a puppet: the distinction between a painted doll or a carved statuette and a puppet is the *sign of movement*. Movement, as opposed to design, however, is only partially inherent to the puppet, as it has to be given to the puppet every time it performs. Movement is defined by the possibilities and limitations of the design and construction as well as by the intentions of the manipulator and is therefore only partially inherent to the puppet, but it is an essential sign of the puppet *in performance*. Puppetry is like dance or pantomime in this sense, in that neither of the three can exist without movement. Pantomime, in fact, is so close in its methodology to the puppet theater that Fijan, Ballard and Starobin in *Directing Puppet Theatre* declare that

Pantomime is the basis of all puppetry. It is the visual development of the story without words. A person whose hearing is impaired should be able to watch a puppet performance and understand the story because the movements the puppets make, the positions they assume, and their relationship to the stage are all clear and concise.¹⁵⁶

Although pantomime does not, by definition, use any text in its performances while puppetry can and often does work with the spoken word, it is a fact that puppetry is based on movement more than on anything else. Fijan, Ballard and Starobin make the very important observation that

¹⁵⁵ This is true even in the case of object animation where there may be no apparent design to the performing object. Design, in the sense used here, does not necessarily denote the act of drawing, carving, assembling, painting etc. a figure, but rather consciously choosing and employing an inanimate object to represent something other than itself.

¹⁵⁶ Carol Fijan and Frank Ballard with Christina Starobin, *Directing puppet theatre step by step* (San Jose, Calif.: Resource Publications, 1989) 17.

If words are necessary to explain the action, something is wrong with the blocking. If it hasn't been said in pantomime, it hasn't been said. Too many puppeteers rely on dialogue to tell the story when it should be apparent from watching the pantomime.¹⁵⁷

Even further removed from the object itself, the *sign of speech* is not inherent to the puppet in any way. Puppets have no voice and even though in a performance the audience will willfully accept, as a convention of the genre, that the words are spoken by the puppet rather than the actor manipulating it, it is evident that speech does not come from the puppet, nor do the elements of design, character and movement of the puppet have any effect on the speech produced by the actor. Thus, speech is only an additional, optional element of any puppet theater performance, and is therefore by no means an essential sign of the puppet.

While puppetry is able to perform the dramatic text, its semiotics rather dictates that it not place primary emphasis on the spoken word. This understanding becomes a possibility rather than a hindrance if one accepts Marowitz' claim that it is not always the routine repetition of the text the audience is looking for in Shakespeare but the countless ways in which his themes and imagery can speak to us today. As he writes,

The overriding aesthetic question today is: what permutations and what contemporary insights can be fashioned from the body of work bequeathed us over 400 years of Shakespearean history? The answer to that question may involve the smallest fraction of Shakespeare's original work – perhaps none of his language at all and only some of the ideas contained in his stories and his themes.¹⁵⁸

It is a fact that puppetry has the potential for creating interesting “permutations” of literary works and is a suitable medium for fashioning “contemporary insights” from classical plays. It is also safe to assume that if there is a genre that can stage Shakespeare with “none of his language at all” and still claim to present an adaptation of the original, then this genre is the puppet theater. The possibility of finding new answers in a 400-year-old play by staging a performance that has the potential to be thought-provoking, current and unique in its method of communication seems to lend support to the idea of staging *Hamlet* in the puppet theater.

Let us, then, recollect the basic preconceptions in connection with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; those associations, iconic images and elements of our cultural heritage that make the play suitable for translation to the idiom of puppetry. As Jan Kott notes in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, “no Dane of flesh and blood has been written about so extensively as

¹⁵⁷ Fijan, Ballard and Starobin 17.

¹⁵⁸ Marowitz 30.

Hamlet”.¹⁵⁹ It is the most well-known play in world literature and as a consequence, some of its lines are known even to those who have never actually read or seen a Shakespearean piece. This play has an awesome history of productions on stage and on the screen, and, although there is great variety in the way one interprets the text, there appears to be a self-evident tradition of what elements must be present in all adaptations. Such elements are the inevitable “To be or not to be” (3.1.64) soliloquy, the ghost of the dead king appearing, or the famous duel at the end of the play. This, of course, sounds more than logical, for how would one present *Hamlet* without these fundamental parts? Yet, with *Exit*, one is faced with a performance that will break most of these sacred rules. We will not see the ghost, we will not hear the famous lines spoken, and there will not be a duel. There are hardly any dialogues, no monologues, and nothing happens in the strict sense of the word. There is no madness, no witty conversation and no murder. Moreover, Hamlet himself will rarely appear in the performance, and when he does, his is merely a support role in the scenes of the other characters.

One could ask then: what has it all got to do with the Shakespearean masterpiece? The answer is that *Hamlet* is, of course, more than just the text written by the playwright. Jan Kott says we have been separated from the text of Hamlet just as Mona Lisa’s smile has been separated from the picture. “It is not just Mona Lisa smiling at us now, but all those who have tried to analyze or imitate that smile”.¹⁶⁰ Consequently, when one performs *Hamlet* one does not simply perform the text written sometime around 1601, but rather the *Hamlet* which, owing to the immense accumulation of associations connected to its author, its characters, its different textual versions including its translations, its past performances and its endless number of adaptations, is now a cultural formation existing outside the text itself. If we allow that a written drama is something more than just its words, it is easy to see that the text is but one of the existing versions (albeit the oldest existing version) of the play. If this is understood, then performance can be something more than merely the performance of the text: it can be the performance of the play – a play existing outside the text with all its connotations and associations. Kidnie comes to a similar conclusion when she says “performance and text are both, in their different ways, instances of the work”. Accepting that *Hamlet* is something that can and does exist outside its text will open up endless possibilities for experiencing different instances of the play. It will mean that even a theatrical medium governed by images and action, such as puppetry, may be able to perform, if not the text, but

¹⁵⁹ Jan Kott. *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. New York: Methuen, 1967. (58).

¹⁶⁰ Kott 58.

the work/play itself, provided that here we are not employing the term “work” in the Barthesian sense of the readerly text for comfortable consumption, but much rather in the sense of a potential for actualization in the sense of reader response criticism.

3.3. *Hamlet* without its text

The German adaptation managed to join Shakespeare and puppetry by understanding that it is not the text they had to operate with. The creators may have felt that *Hamlet*, like the Mona Lisa, is something that everyone wants to see, but with which most people will be thoroughly disappointed afterwards. The famous picture is encased in bulletproof glass, as *Hamlet* is encased in its ‘bulletproof’ text. The text is sacred, something that we dare not touch, lest we damage it in some way and lose something from its value. Wilde&Vogel have chosen to separate from the text and turn to “Hamlet’s independent life”.¹⁶¹ This independent life, as has been explained, involves everything that has ever been associated with *Hamlet*. Instead of performing the play itself, the puppet theater *Hamlet* aims to present what *Hamlet* is about, from the creators’ perspective.

As Jan Kott notes, there are numerous subjects in *Hamlet*, such as politics, force opposed to morality, the divergence between theory and practice, the ultimate purpose of life, love, and an endless number of other topics.¹⁶² In theory, even on the dramatic stage it is impossible to present all of *Hamlet*. As Kott continues “Hamlet cannot be performed in its entirety, because the performance would last nearly six hours. One has to select, curtail and cut. One can perform only one of several Hamlets potentially existing in this arch-play”.¹⁶³ One has to understand that any adaptation “will always be a poorer Hamlet than Shakespeare’s Hamlet is; but it may also be a Hamlet enriched by being of our time”.¹⁶⁴

The German production is evidently of our eclectic time, mixing Shakespeare with Elvis Costello and Celine Dion. At the same time, however, it is completely timeless, as it takes place after death. The time of *Exit* is after the time of the original play; it begins when all the characters of *Hamlet* are already dead. Time is definitely out of joint, and it seems no one was able to set it right. Why else would the dead characters still haunt the stage? The performance is a *psychomancy*, an eerie fantasy of calling the dead to life. It is a gruesome metaphor of puppetry itself, an experimental *metapuppetry* we might even call it, where the

¹⁶¹ Kott 58.

¹⁶² Kott 58.

¹⁶³ Kott 58.

¹⁶⁴ Kott 58

inanimate (i.e., dead) object is given life, it is animated. This quality of animation and turning verbal poetry into visual art and continually reflecting on its own representational nature is where the puppet theater is at its best. The German performance presents the emotions, moods, images and sounds connected to the *Hamlet* story, the complex phenomenon of the subtext behind the text. In doing so, it drastically upsets the Shakespearean dramaturgy and rearranges the drama into a framework of the dead characters coming to life and acting out some moments of their past glory.

Nola Rae's adaptation, quite inventively entitled *Handlet* (as it is performed using only the puppeteer's hands dressed in colored gloves), also rearranges the dramaturgy of the play but instead of deconstructing the scenes and reconstituting them according to her own unique interpretation of the major themes in the drama, Rae simply condenses the entire story into a twenty minute outline. She successfully exhibits the most renowned elements of the play by performing a very clear and quick paced synopsis of the plot, but the performance does not provide material nor leave time for thinking about the associations connected to the phenomenon of *Hamlet* as a play existing outside its text or outside its plot. Rae does not seem to strive for providing an interpretation of the drama: she does not raise or try to answer any questions of morality, fate, inevitability, murder, love or revenge. The performance does not present the difficulty of choices between obligation and free will, decency and immorality, possibilities and desire, honor and life. What Rae does, in fact, is present a nonverbal version of the plot of *Hamlet*, as much based on Tom Stoppard's *Fifteen Minute Hamlet*¹⁶⁵ as on Shakespeare's play. The performance contains a number of inventive solutions for outlining such a complex story with nothing but two hands and a collection of colored gloves, most of these solutions being based on unexpected changes and the appearance of characters in unforeseen places, reminiscent of the traditions of the slapstick comedy of market place puppetry and silent movies. While these solutions are a source of comic effect, they are highly repetitive and do not provide any means for presenting the tragic elements of the play. There are but two moments in the entire show where the puppeteer breaks away from the mechanical actions of playing the story and displays a glimpse of what may be possible in the framework of *Handlet*. One such moment is when Hamlet, while telling Ophelia to go to a nunnery, starts tearing at Ophelia's 'dress' (which is, of course the glove, itself) and in one fluid movement removes the glove from the hand, revealing the bare skin underneath. This is, in fact, one of the oldest tricks in the market place puppetry tradition, but revealing the

¹⁶⁵ Tom Stoppard. *The Fifteen Minute Hamlet*. London: Samuel French Ltd, 1978.

animating hand is nevertheless always humorous and surprising. Separating the puppet and the animator and thereby reflecting on the metatheatricality of the genre also serves as the basis for the other moment where Rae allows room for something other than the ‘reciting’ of the plot. When Laertes (represented by a brown glove) carries the dead body of Ophelia (a white glove rendered lifeless as there is no animating hand inside it) in the funeral scene, he stops to squeeze water out of the drowned body. This effect is the opposite of the previously described trick: while in the ‘undressing’ scene it was the hand that continued to represent the character even while the glove became nothing more than a piece of clothing, here it is the disembodied glove that remains as a symbol for the dead Ophelia. While the human hand represents life, whether clothed or not, the unworn glove, as the unanimated puppet, is dead. These moments are representative of what the given technique of puppetry could have been capable of had the puppeteer been more open to exploring the possibilities in the tension between life and the lifeless.

Exit and *Handlet*, although in very different ways, both serve as examples for what the creator of any adaptation, be it for the puppet stage, the live theater or the movie screen, must consider: forming a performance text by rearranging the original dramaturgy. As Kott says “one has to select, curtail and cut”,¹⁶⁶ and the way one carries out these actions will define the characteristics of the given adaptation. Italian film director Franco Zeffirelli, for instance, also reorganized his version of *Hamlet*, his dramaturgy, however, seems to reflect an aim to create a digestible and consistent adaptation for a wide public rather than reflecting upon the nature of the characters or the depth of their conflicts. He tampered radically with the dramaturgy changing the sequence of events, leaving out some scenes and adding others that Shakespeare had not included in his play, and in most cases these changes indeed serve the coherence of the film. By entirely skipping the first scene, however, in which Marcellus and Horatio first see the ghost, Zeffirelli loses the uneasy, suspenseful feeling the scene normally supports. The first two lines of the play, omitted by Zeffirelli, are significant because they set a tone of watchful suspicion (“Who’s there? Nay, answer me; stand, and unfold yourself” 1.1.1-2).

The beginning of *Exit* is an interesting example of how Wilde&Vogel translate the text to moods, sounds and imagery. This version also omits the first dialogue, which is supposed to set the mood of the whole play, but one can still feel the depressed, tense atmosphere of Elsinore. The performance begins in complete darkness with a single light bulb flickering to life and being trailed across the stage accompanied by strange creaking and screeching noises.

¹⁶⁶ Kott 58.

The bulb, later placed in a tin can, will be the only vague source of light for the first few minutes of the performance. The mood is set by imagery and sound without the use of words. The method is very un-Shakespearean, as in the Renaissance theater it was verbal poetry and not the scenery that produced the feeling of tension. Interestingly enough, however, the puppet theater can achieve the same effect without a word being spoken. Since what the artists want to convey is not the story or the text itself but rather the way they translate the text into the language of a complex audio-visual experience, even spectators who have never seen or read *Hamlet* may feel the tension of the opening scene.

The adaptation of the State Puppet Theater of Plovdiv also presents certain aspects of the drama, like the tension of the opening scene or the atmosphere of Denmark as prison, as a complex audio-visual experience. Although this adaptation uses text and many of the dialogues are included, it often reverts to expressing feelings and conflicts through visual signs rather than through speaking the lines. One of its most prominent tools for emending or substituting the text is in a form of double representation very common on the puppet stage. This doubling means that the performance explores the possibilities of representing each character with a puppet as well as an actor, which allows for various ways of portraying inner conflicts, as well as for achieving comic effect. Such moments are, for example, when the puppet Hamlet argues with the actor Hamlet about the possibility of ending his (their?) own life, or when the actor playing Claudius can actually see himself, as the puppet Claudius, playing the murderer in the mouse trap scene. The doubling of representation and the externalization of inner conflicts allow for numerous possibilities for presenting tragedy on the puppet stage; the Bulgarian production, however, chooses to turn the performance into a tragicomedy, or as they advertise their own production, a “tragic farce, a joke on puppets, revealed by real men”.¹⁶⁷ Although one gets the feeling that the wording of the English language playbill of the Bulgarian company may not have been entirely precise, it is clear enough that the performance does not intend to present anything else but a tragi-comic interpretation of Shakespeare’s play. This it achieves in the highest degree, by rallying some of the most basic comedic tools of puppetry. These tools include the caricature-like design of the puppets; playing upon the differences in scale with the props and background being scaled to the puppets in a world inhabited by humans and puppets alike; and manipulators occasionally swapping puppets, creating an absurd confusion of characters in place of many of the tragic

¹⁶⁷ Quoted from the English language playbill of the performance from 2001. I have not been able to attain a Bulgarian version.

moments. All these effects add up to a brilliantly choreographed parody of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Parodistic elements are also a key ingredient in *Exit*. After setting the uneasy mood of the opening scene, *Exit* continues with what seems like a parody of the play, but also a caricature of the puppet theater itself. The actor takes two small paper figures, and, holding them in his hands starts to recite the text, calling out the characters' names before speaking their lines. Like a child playing with plastic Barbie dolls:

Pol. What do you read, my lord?
Ham. Words, words, words. (2.2.210)

At first, the meaning is largely lost, especially considering the fact that Michael Vogel says some lines in English and others in German, a feature of the show which, as I learned from Vogel, was originally the result of him not yet having learned the text of the play in English. After the first few performances, however, Soehnle instructed Vogel to keep on switching between the two languages, since this emphasizes the message that conveying the text will be of minor importance in this performance.¹⁶⁸ Polonius says "Will you walk out of the air, my lord?", to which Hamlet answers "Into my grave?" (2.2.224-25). And with the actor's tone changing from childish play-acting to a strange sarcasm, we already understand that what we are about to witness is a world away from an infantile game with dolls and words. After Hamlet's answer, the scene changes. The sharp sounds of an electric guitar follow the spoken lines, and, as a dim light is cast on the stage, we find ourselves in a cemetery. This is where everything begins. This is Denmark, but it is not a prison any more, it is a graveyard. That something is rotten in the state of Denmark is obvious from the very first moment. It is the smell of death, of putrefying corpses. The stage itself is built from dry-rotten floorboards, and the figures that appear from under these boards seem as if they were already half-decayed. But it is not only the bodies that are long dead. This is a play of dead hopes and ambitions: the exact elements that, in their full vitality, are supposed to promote action in all drama. In this version, however, the characters are long past their ambitions. They try to reproduce events of their lives and relive some moments worth remembering.

Quite contrary to Nola Rae's adaptation of the play where emotions are condensed into extremely clear gestures and all dramatic content is at the mercy of the urgent rush of the storyline, the story of the Shakespearean play itself is of little interest in *Exit*. A puppet gravedigger enacts the entire plot in a few minutes using a skull, a tin can and a ham

¹⁶⁸ Since there is a high degree of improvisation in the performance and Vogel switches freely between the languages, here I will provide all spoken lines in English.

sandwich. Rather profanely, the ham sandwich will represent the prince of Denmark himself. This again is, of course, a parody of what the puppet theater can do: it can oversimplify and become vacuous. However, as the performance goes on, it becomes clear that this is not a puppeteer's easy escape from having to present the story properly. The cycle of actions taking place in the Castle of Elsinore is simply unimportant for the creators of *Exit*. It is not the plot itself that makes a difference between the traditional revenge plays of the 16th century and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In *Hamlet* the emphasis is not on the action but on the inner conflicts of the characters: consciousness battling it out with conscience.¹⁶⁹ The characters are all guilty of treachery, incest and murder. Their "offense is rank, it smells to heaven" (3.3.39). Their sins alone would be enough to deny them eternal peace. In addition, however, it seems that these characters were unable to deal with what had happened to them. They cannot rest in peace because they are still feeling their grievances. They return from the grave one by one, as if in hope of putting the broken pieces of their lives back together, if only for a brief moment.

In the Plovdiv *Hamlet* the intricate design of the puppets already works towards depicting the personality of the protagonists, however, the fact that each player is represented by a puppet and an actor at the same time allows for even more detailed characterization. The personalities are further developed through the possibilities of presenting, with actor and puppet, two sides of an argument at the same time. Nola Rae, conversely, has no other means of characterization than the very simple visual signs of colors (a different color for each player) and the movement of each protagonist. This is where Rae is at her best: as an immensely skilled puppeteer and mime artist, she is keenly aware of the possibilities in characterization through movement. Still, even with her expert and very distinctive manipulation, Rae leaves no room for anything else than presenting the plotline, as explained earlier.

In *Exit* it is the characters and their subjective stories that are in the focus of the performance. Since each protagonist appears and disappears without encountering anyone else but the puppeteer on stage, there are barely any dialogues and there is no strict storyline. Characterization is achieved through the design of the puppets and through portraying the inner conflicts they are forced to relive. Gertrude is the first to arise from the grave. She is a

¹⁶⁹ Cf. John Bayley in *Shakespeare and Tragedy* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), who speaks about *Hamlet* as a tragedy of consciousness emphasizing that it is the conflict between a character's awareness of his situation and his will and possibilities for acting that is the driving force in this type of drama. This is similar to what Mark William Roche in *Tragedy and Comedy* calls the tragedy of awareness in which the collision takes place within a single individual conscious of his own conflict with external circumstances.

larger than life-size figure, a pitiful pile of rags with skeleton-like limbs sticking out of her decaying evening dress. From the way Vogel (occasionally playing Hamlet, and at other times acting the part of a neutral manipulator) carries the puppet Gertrude in his arms and from the admiration with which he looks at the queen, it is obvious that he wants to see his mother once more as the ideal of femininity she had once been to him. Gertrude attempts to regain her onetime glory as she is taken to a microphone standing center stage. Hamlet, in hope of seeing her in her full magnificence again tells her to sing a song. Making Gertrude sing is the metaphor of wringing her heart (“And let me wring your heart” 3.4.43), of forcing her to face facts and admit that she is not entirely innocent in her first husband’s death. Gertrude begins to sing, but she manages no more than a few gruff lines. She is like a worn out prima donna with all her splendor and appeal long gone. She sings a song from Celine Dion, which opens with the lines “When I fall in love / it will be forever”. One may choose, in this song, to hear Gertrude trying to justify her marriage to Claudius by saying that ‘love is blind’, or think that she has realized she is actually longing for the murdered old Hamlet. The German interpretation allows for both, and an additional, third solution, i.e. that the only one Gertrude ever loved whole-heartedly was her son. The ambiguity of the English word ‘love’ is later resolved in the performance to imply unambiguous passion and sexuality.

The question of sexuality is one which many adaptations have trouble dealing with, particularly the sexually charged relationship of Hamlet and his mother. Although, as Janet Adelman says in *Suffocating Mothers*, *Hamlet* is a play that focuses on the crisis of man and his “radical confrontation with the sexualized maternal body”¹⁷⁰, neither Nola Rae’s nor the Bulgarian performance addresses the problem. The previously mentioned film version of Franco Zeffirelli, however, seems to adopt Adelman’s view to some extent, providing an interpretation similar to the one found in *Exit*. In both adaptations, Hamlet and Gertrude have an almost explicit sexual relationship. In Zeffirelli’s film their common way of greeting each other is a kiss on the lips, which, though suggestive of sexual content, may still be interpreted ambiguously. In Gertrude’s bedchamber, however, where Hamlet stabs Polonius, the heated dispute between mother and son turns into an unambiguous rape scene. Hamlet throws Gertrude on her bed, forces her into a submissive position and makes movements that suggest sexual intercourse. Gertrude kisses Hamlet on the lips to quiet him, but this kiss is a world away from the ones they had exchanged at the beginning of the film. It is full of passion, and is a fierce but not at all dismissive reaction to Hamlet’s vehement approach.

¹⁷⁰ Janet Adelman. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to the Tempest*. New York: Routledge, 1992. 11.

In Zeffirelli's film it was Hamlet who seemed to be the active member in the relationship; it was he who was unable to control his desires towards his mother. It was also clear, however, that until the bed chamber scene Gertrude was the dominant one as she was the only person Hamlet listened to. She was the one who could persuade Hamlet not to go to Wittenberg, for example:

Queen. Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet:
I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg.
Ham. I shall in all my best obey you, madam (1.2.122-24).

In *Exit* the words "Let not thy mother lose her prayers" (1.2.122-24) signal the power Gertrude has over Hamlet. Hamlet does not object, and as he helps Gertrude away from the microphone, he is the one who becomes helpless. Gertrude finds her strength in blaming Hamlet for everything that had happened, for had it not been for Hamlet "wringing Gertrude's heart", she would have easily lived on repressing her sense of guilt. But Hamlet enters his mother's bedchamber and opens Pandora's Box. It is in this room that Hamlet commits his first murder; it is here that Hamlet confronts Gertrude with her shame of incest and her own complicity in the death of the old king; and it is here that mother and son realize their own incestuous relationship.

Gertrude, in consequence, cannot bear the weight of the situation. In Zeffirelli's film she silences Hamlet with a passionate kiss. In *Exit* she goes much further. She grabs Hamlet and, as an echo of the violent bed scene in the film, she forces him into a wild and passionate tango performed to the harsh sounds extorted from an electric guitar. She is the one who leads, and the scene becomes especially expressive as it is a puppet forcing its will on the manipulator. At the end of the scene the puppet Gertrude literally falls apart and becomes a dry-rotten pile of bones and ragged clothes. Hamlet places her under the floorboards without any feeling of contentment or ease. Opening Gertrude's eyes has been pointless, for although she has come to understand where she had gone wrong, all remains unchanged.

As a transition to the next scene in *Exit*, Michael Vogel sings Complicated Shadows from Elvis Costello.

Well you know your time has come
And you're sorry for what you've done
You should never have been playing with a gun
In those complicated shadows

He sings these lines to Gertrude, who has just understood the weight of what she had done. He also sings these lines to himself, Hamlet, who pulled the trigger when he decided to "wring Gertrude's heart" and unleashed the demon of all the incestuous relationships in the drama.

Furthermore, he sings these lines to Claudius, who also seems to be sorry for what he had done. The king is the next to appear from under the rotten boards with the words:

O, my offence is rank it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder. Pray can I not (3.3.40).

But the 'shadows' are much more 'complicated' than they seem. In *Exit* Claudius is not only fighting the shadows of his conscience, but also the shadows of his lost power. One should not forget that in *Exit* the characters have the chance to look back and evaluate past events. Claudius is pathetic as he is unable to honestly renounce his past deeds and finally understand the weight of his own words. Instead, he re-enacts the greatest achievement of his life: his coming to power. He builds his rule upon a pile of mutilated body parts, which he digs out from different graves. Death does not change people; Claudius did the same when he was alive. He came to power by killing the old king and taking what was his: his crown, his wife and his son. Now that he returns from "the undiscover'd country" (3.1.87) he can do nothing else but be true to his past and take away from others what little they still possess: their crumbling bones, if nothing else is left.

The figure of Claudius is a tiny, insignificant head, with no apparent body to support it. He is literally a spineless figure with only a rag of cloth for a body ("A king of shreds and patches" 3.4.117). But as soon as he digs out some once majestic-looking hands (maybe the old king's?) to replace his own, he starts to grow. The scene began with Claudius' unsuccessful prayer but now he is in control again. This is his great moment, his coming to power; the part in his famous opening speech where, after talking about his "most valiant brother" he says "So much for him. Now for ourself" (1.2.25-26). In *Exit* Claudius swells into a grotesque, gigantic figure with a miniscule head while delivering his speech. Vogel, who now manipulates the figure from under a huge white sheet, controls the puppet-head with his mouth, his own hands becoming the oversized limbs of the puppet and, thus, the eerie figure delivers his speech in a distorted, nonsense language (with the puppet itself blocking Vogel's articulation). The distorted English lines, spoken (or rather shouted) with a German accent and occasionally actually switching to a no less inarticulate German, invoke unmistakable associations of 20th century dictators. In this fantasy-play, Claudius finally achieves what he had always dreamt of: full dictatorship. But in this world of long-forgotten decay the only one he has any power over is the insignificant paper figure of Polonius. In the end Claudius is jerked down under the rotten boards, back to where he came from, by the unseen demons of his past. His success in this afterlife is as short-lived as was the one in his previous life.

Ophelia is represented by a near human-size puppet, with carefully polished features, wearing a long white dress. She retained something of her past beauty, but her pale complexion is unearthly. She is the one character whose most memorable moment in life seems to have been her death. She barely speaks at all. Death has been present all through the performance, although none of the characters seemed to take notice of it. This is precisely their conflict: they cannot accept the fact that it is all over and that being dead means decisions made in the past are irreversible. All they can do is re-enact their deeds without ever truly understanding what it was that they had done wrong. This interpretation rhymes well with that of Tom Stoppard, offered in his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. In the last scene, Guildenstern says, “There must have been a moment, at the beginning, when we could have said – no. But somehow we missed it” (Act 3). The characters in *Exit* also seem to feel that there was a moment when they could have said ‘no’, but they do not go as far as to consciously look for it. As they enter the stage, they seem to forget that the last time they had been here things had gone disastrously wrong.

Ophelia is just like the other characters in this sense: she does not come on stage to become a different person or to change what had been done, but merely to dutifully and mechanically relive her part in a story that had already ended. But as she is about to engage in a conversation with Hamlet, which of course already took place before, she somehow grasps the absurdity of the situation and simply refuses to reenact her part. Why is Ophelia the only one who realizes that they are mere shadows of the original characters of the play entitled Hamlet? Why does she feel the presence and, indeed, see the physical manifestation of death? We may try to find the answer in the way all the other characters in the original play died. They were all killed unexpectedly, unaware of their end, without having a chance to come to terms with their fate. Ophelia was the only one who had the opportunity to prepare for death: a sense of reconciliation is necessary for anyone committing suicide, even if this reconciliation is brought forth by madness. Ophelia became acquainted with death before actually dying. In *Exit* death and Ophelia meet again as old acquaintances, or rather, as lovers. For there is a reason why Ophelia retained her past beauty: death seems to show a preference for beautiful young girls who take their own lives. Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet* also comes to this conclusion when he finds the seemingly dead Juliet in the tomb:

Why art thou yet so fair? shall I believe
That unsubstantial death is amorous,
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour? (5.3.102-5)

In the German performance, death visits Ophelia in the form of a skeleton-like vulture with sharp claws and tattered wings. The revolting animal settles upon the slumping figure of Ophelia and embraces her. The depiction of such an affectionate affiliation with death is reminiscent of Cleopatra's words in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, where, after seeing the death of one of her attendants and shortly before she herself dies from the venom of the asp which she applies to her body, the Queen of Egypt says "The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch, / Which hurts, and is desired" (5.2.350). In *Exit* this combination of pain and lifeless desire is what is reflected in Ophelia's last moments on stage.

While *Exit* is a story of the dead, both Nola Rae's adaptation and the Bulgarian performance are full of life, and not even the death of the protagonists can be taken seriously. Although Rae leaves as little room for comedy as she does for tragedy to take effect in the race to introduce the full plot in twenty minutes, the very idea of presenting a condensed *Hamlet* with colored gloves serves comic effect, as do the elements of the sped-up slapstick chases typical of silent films or the duel scene reenacted in the crude style of a Punch and Judy show. The Plovdiv Puppet Theater's production consciously emphasizes the numerous comic elements in the drama (the witticisms of the gravediggers, the absurdity of the barely distinguishable Rosencrantz and Guildenstern or the antics of the old fool, Polonius), but it also turns the tragic elements (the Ghost's appearance, Ophelia's losing her wits or Polonius' death) into farce and a parody. One of the greatest sources of comic effect in the production is Hamlet's indecision, as he becomes a pathetic, spoiled and whining youth unable to follow the simplest instructions handed to him by the Ghost.

Few elements of *Exit* bring comic relief, and even in such moments the sense of comedy is always tinted with the uneasy knowledge of all the characters being dead. One example is the disproportionate figure of Claudius and his neurotic movements, which seem humorous only until one realizes that this pathetic creature has the potential to become the embodiment of the worst of dictators. As opposed to all other characters in *Exit*, then, the puppet gravedigger who appears at the beginning of the performance is full of life and full of comedy. This is his play; he is the one whose memories bring the characters to life once more. If Stoppard could have a play staged from the perspectives of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, why could one not have a play from the point of view of the gravedigger? In *Exit* the gravedigger is the only one who is alive, and still he is the one for whom death is the most natural thing on earth. In the original play, Hamlet cannot understand how anyone can take death as lightly as the gravedigger:

Ham. Has this fellow no feeling for his business,

that he sings at grave-making?
Hor. Custom hath made it in him a property of
easiness. (5.1.67-70)

The gravedigger is a comic character in this performance, just as he is in the original piece. He is, in fact, a representative of a certain type of comedy: with a face very much like that of the shrewd and witty character of Italian Comedia dell'Arte, called Pasquariello, he is the archetypal scheming clown. Pasquariello is the figure of a servant or old man; a trickster and an entertainer, usually playing scenes with another servant. This is true in the case of *Exit* as well, as at the beginning of the performance the gravedigger appears together with his apprentice, played live by Vogel. This is an ingeniously designed scene with a puppet acting as the master of ceremonies and its human manipulator an underling. Vogel manages to separate his own thoughts, words and movements from those of the puppet: we see him moving the figure, we hear the puppet speaking in his voice, but the two clowns, the live figure and the puppet, are always distinguishable. There is also a clear difference in their status: quite ingeniously it is the puppet who has the upper hand in their common scenes.

Playing two characters at the same time with a perfect separation of persona and movement is something only the best of puppeteers are able to do, and it takes years of practice to present such a schizophrenic state of mind with full authenticity. Vogel uses this same technique of the puppet theater to emphasize the differences in status in numerous parts of the performance. When Claudius appears on stage, for instance, Vogel sometimes acts out interactions between the puppet Claudius and a very meek and dishonored human Hamlet, while at other times he simply acts as the puppeteer without any second role. Another example for a play on the differences in status is the previously described scene with Gertrude, where initially the human Hamlet is the one supporting and encouraging Gertrude, but by the end of the scene it is the puppet who takes charge and forces the puppeteer into a grotesque tango. Although Vogel never hides behind a draught or the scenery, he achieves the effect that at times the audience barely notices his presence on stage while at others he becomes a prominent player in the drama. In the scenes with Ophelia he does the same; at times he is Hamlet, while at others he is just the manipulator. These are all scenes of constant duality, as is the one with the two gravediggers, and this systematic foregrounding of the omnipresence of dualities and ambiguities is as much an element of the Shakespearean original as it is of *Exit*.

After the puppet gravedigger enacts Hamlet's family tragedy with a tin can, a skull and a sandwich (certainly very reminiscent of the way the Renaissance emblematic theater

endows objects with multiple connotations), he invites his assistant to join him in playing ‘a game of Hamlet’. He says this as if this were his favorite leisure time activity. While other gravediggers might prefer a game of cards or chess in between two jobs, he enacts the tragedy of the people whose bones he uncovers. Besides being a source of laughter, the comical character of the gravedigger is also a source of profound wisdom. He knows everything about death and the dead. He knows which skull belonged to whom, who the person was, when and how he or she died. In *Exit* the gravedigger also integrates some characteristics of Polonius, namely his hidden acting ambitions. This becomes evident when the gravedigger actually speaks some of Polonius’ lines, those in which he talks about his past success as an actor. There is, however, a minor change in the text:

I played once i’ the university [...]
I was accounted a good actor. [...]
I did enact *Hamlet*: I was killed i’ the
Capitol; Brutus killed me (3.2.104-10).

In the original play, Polonius talks about playing Julius Caesar, but the gravedigger in *Exit* is not interested in playing the hero of a story unknown to him. That would not be relevant because he knows nothing about a Roman Emperor who had died long ago in a distant land. The story of Hamlet, however, sounds rather exciting. Hamlet is someone he can relate to; the gravedigger was, after all, the one who buried the whole Danish royal family. Who else would be more entitled to play the part? He, however, gives the part of Hamlet to his assistant. In this performance the prince of Denmark is not a desirable role: all Hamlet does is relive the most awkward situations of his life. He has to confront his incestuous feelings towards his mother again, he has to witness Claudius coming to power once more, and he has to face the fact that Ophelia once again chooses death over him. There is nothing grand or inspiring in playing Hamlet. The puppet gravedigger lets his young assistant (Vogel, the actor) have the part of Hamlet, while he plays the role of the master of ceremonies. It is from his somewhat contorted, dark and morbid viewpoint that we see the characters of the play. This is the gravedigger’s grotesque but nevertheless faithful account of the story. He is the one whose memories bring the characters of *Hamlet* onto the stage, and he is also the one who puts an end to this psychomancy.

Exit ends with the two gravediggers finishing up their ‘quick game of *Hamlet*’. The puppet tells the actor “let’s leave the dead to have their rest”, and with a round of uproarious laughter at the great time they had, they return to their usual business of digging graves. Again one is faced with one of the common methods of how the puppet theater deals with

tragedy: the ending emphasizes the senselessness in the tragedy by turning it into its own parody or a farce. This, however, does not take away from the bitterness of the conclusion, for the spectator knows that these dead characters will never have their rest. The message of the last scene is reminiscent of the last words of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. He writes, “races condemned to one hundred years of solitude are not given a second opportunity on earth”.¹⁷¹ The characters of *Exit* are given a second opportunity every night, with every performance, if not on this earth but in the fictional world of a puppet show. They, however miss this second chance every time, and are, thus, condemned to an eternity of solitude.

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked the question whether there is anything a puppet theater adaptation of Shakespeare can add to the experience of the audience by producing something entirely different from the traditional interpretations of the work. As we have seen, the three performances discussed above take entirely different routes to presenting the drama and all three do, in fact, contain elements that may be regarded as adding to the experience of an audience expecting to see an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Nola Rae’s performance can be especially effective for those who have not had much experience with the puppet theater; she builds her show on a single governing idea (the colored gloves representing the players) and she uses many of the well-established formulae of puppetry, many of which, to anyone acquainted with the world of puppetry, may seem as cliché. The fact, however, that she manages to show in movement what Stoppard accomplishes in words in his *Fifteen Minute Hamlet*, is an attraction in itself, and it is by no coincidence that Rae’s adaptation is very popular with schools where students required to read Shakespeare’s longest play marvel at the possibility of receiving the entire story in a highly entertaining, twenty minute nonverbal puppet show. And receive the story they will; but they will not gain much experience of the play itself.

This is where Rae’s condensed version is different from the other two adaptations, both of which aim at presenting the “Shakespearean experience”¹⁷² Marowitz talks about, the phenomenon of *Hamlet* that has been separated from the text itself, consisting of all the cultural connotations and iconic images we associate with the drama, as well as our experiences of past performances and readings of the play. The Bulgarian performance builds very strongly on such elements of the Shakespearean work and often deviates from the original dramaturgy in favor of emphasizing the comic nature of a situation or showing a

¹⁷¹ Gabriel García Márquez. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York : Harper & Row: 1970. 428.

¹⁷² Marowitz 31.

possible interpretation of an intriguing conflict. Although the Plovdiv *Hamlet* chooses almost exclusively to employ the comedic tools of the puppet theater, this performance features many of the unique methods of representation available to puppetry when it is staging Shakespeare.

When one watches *Exit* by Wilde&Vogel, one feels an accelerated rhythm of intensification through which each character's existence is somehow molded into an extremely concentrated experience. It takes a thorough knowledge and understanding of the play from the part of the creators to be able to present the drama of each individual character in such a condensed form. Those hoping to see a traditional adaptation will probably miss Hamlet, the gloomy fool, the pensive prince, the faltering philosopher, the vengeful sleepwalker or the melancholic rebel. They will miss Hamlet and Laertes fighting in Ophelia's grave, they will miss the experience of hearing a delivery of the famous great monologue, and they will miss the dying Hamlet speaking the words "the rest is silence" (5.2.395). But those watching the performance with an open mind will understand that Shakespeare's art is not limited to the level of words but can be translated to the language of images and symbols. If one listens to puppets very carefully, one is sure to hear "speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture".¹⁷³

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter set out to analyze the practicability and relevance as well as the tools and methodology of three puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In answer to the questions whether presenting *Hamlet* without its text is in any way justifiable and whether such an adaptation adds something to the experience of the audience, it was argued that no amount of rearranging, radical altering, drastic cutting, or even complete transmutation can ever harm the Shakespearean original itself, and therefore, the theater can claim the right to look for the subtext behind the text and interpret Shakespeare without the fear of damaging a masterpiece. The justification for the existence of a puppet theater adaptation of *Hamlet* is, thus, no different from the justification of any other interpretation: because no ideal interpretation exists, and because the "original" itself was already a unique intertextual combination of traditions and inventions, it is within the freedom of the adapting medium to decide which themes of the play to accentuate, where to place the emphasis within the given

¹⁷³ *The Winter's Tale* (5.2.14)

themes, and how to allow for the audience to perceive the performance as a recognizable but at the same time creative interpretation of Shakespeare's original.

The final argument for the relevance of a new puppet theater adaptation of *Hamlet* was based on the observation that the audience today is not necessarily looking for the repetition of the Shakespearean text, but for those qualities of a performance that can bring them closer to the '*Shakespearean experience*'. This experience is based on the phenomenon of *Hamlet* that has been separated from the text itself, and which consists of all of those cultural connotations and images we associate with the drama, as well as our experiences of past performances and readings of the play. Puppetry, owing to its unique methods of communication and especially to its ability to express complex notions without the use of speech, is capable of providing a medium for an interpretation based on this experience.

In discussing the specific adaptations it was shown that while Nola Rae's performance uses many of the well-established formulae of puppetry to produce a condensed version of the plot of *Hamlet* rather than reflecting on the characters or the nature of their conflicts and the Bulgarian production, while showing possible interpretations of situations mainly emphasizes the absurdity of play, *Exit* manages to effectively present the characters and their tragedy in a largely nonverbal performance, using the tools and methods of puppetry.

The next chapter will present a comprehensive discussion of the process of creating my own puppet theater adaptation of *Hamlet*.

Chapter 4. Adaptation in action – designing and staging *Re:Hamlet*

This chapter will present a comprehensive analysis of the process of creating an adaptation for the puppet stage. In Chapters 2 and 3 I examined ways others have produced adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, and, although in the case of *Exit* I have had some insight into the actual creative process, I have largely taken the position of the critic who draws his conclusions from seeing a final product. In contrast to this approach, in the following I will provide a detailed account of the practical aspects of creating an adaptation from the point of view of the ‘creators’¹⁷⁴.

In Chapter 1 I proposed three specific questions that need to be addressed by someone aspiring to create a puppet theater adaptation of a Shakespearean play. These questions were: (1) WHY (why are new adaptations justifiable and relevant); (2) WHAT (what is the direction the specific adaptation will take) and; (3) HOW (how can the puppet stage lend new relevance and actuality to the text and how can the play be suited for the puppet stage in light of the potential horizons of expectations of the audience). The first question was addressed in detail in the previous chapter, in discussing the viability of a nonverbal puppet adaptation of *Hamlet*. The present chapter is divided into two sections corresponding to the questions of WHAT and HOW.

The first section will try to show how the treatment of the text, as well as the choice of the specific puppet technique will affect and, conceivably serve, the given interpretation. I will first outline the basic dramaturgic concepts in *Re:Hamlet* and then show the benefits as

¹⁷⁴ The term ‘creator’ will be used in this chapter to indicate anyone involved in the creation and staging of an adaptation of a literary work. Similarly, ‘director’ will also refer to a person or persons working on the staging of a performance rather than to someone sitting in the empty auditorium and telling the actors what to do. In today’s theater the roles of adapting the text and staging the performance are often separate: one is done by the dramaturge, the other by the director, with the actors rarely having any role at all in preparing the material for the stage. The larger a theater, the more separated the functions are: only in the first phase of a production (that is before the actors even see the script) the Budapest Puppet Theater, for example, generally works with a dramaturge, a director, a director’s assistant, a puppet designer, a set designer, a costume designer and a light designer in preparation for the actual stage rehearsals. *Re:Hamlet*, in contrast, was created by three people: Balázs Szigeti, Judit Wunder and myself. It was only the designer, Judit Wunder, who had a more or less clearly definable role in the work process: she was responsible for designing, and later painting and dressing the puppets. It was my task to carve and construct the marionettes, while Szigeti and I worked together from the first moments of developing the idea of the adaptation to the final touches of adjusting the lights before the premier, and are still working on improving the show even one year after the first performance. Although ultimately it is Szigeti who is outside, giving instructions, and I am on the stage doing the show, the term that would best describe our roles in designing this performance is probably ‘creator’. While ‘creation’ may be understood as a much more serious and metaphysical matter than the very much down-to-earth business of finding the direction for, that is ‘directing’ a performance, I have used and will continue using this word since it very aptly refers to the first and most important element of any adaptation, which is ‘creativity’.

well as the disadvantages of the chosen technique, the string marionette. In the second section I will provide a detailed analysis of the tools and methodology of staging *Re:Hamlet*.

4.1. The direction of the adaptation: basic concepts in *Re:Hamlet*

The direction *Re:Hamlet* took was defined by two people: director Balázs Szigeti¹⁷⁵ and puppeteer Bence Sarkadi. While the aim of this chapter is to provide an objective analysis of the process of creating an adaptation, such an analysis could not be completely neutral even if it were not performed by the director/creator/actor of the show but by an impartial critic. As Jan Kott says, “It is virtually impossible for a director, and even more so for a critic to be ‘correct’. If someone wants to be ‘correct’, they must become a proof-reader and not a director or critic”.¹⁷⁶ In this particular instance, I stand as director *and* critic and even though all the key concepts of the production are either supported or deliberately questioned by setting them against the theories of scholars and observations of notable theater practitioners, it is impossible for someone in such a position to perform a completely impartial analysis of his own work. The point of the exercise, however, is not to assess the value or success of the production, or even to decide whether the concept of *Re:Hamlet* is in any way better than any other concept of adaptation, but to show how this particular system of translating Shakespeare’s text to a nonverbal medium can be applied in practice. Even if such an investigation cannot claim to be absolutely objective, it can and will aim to be thorough (considering multiple aspects of the method applied), diagnostic (examining the problems involved in applying this method), scientific (contributing to what is at stake in the theoretical matrix of my argumentation) and authentic (providing a practical insight into the workings of the puppet theater).

If one accepts the notion that it is possible to analyze one’s own work and draw relevant conclusions from such an investigation, it will be equally important to incorporate the observations of Balázs Szigeti. The project of creating *Re:Hamlet* was Szigeti’s first attempt at directing a puppet performance, and it was precisely his lack of experience with puppets, as well as his thorough understanding of the Shakespearean text that made working together with him interesting, and in retrospect, quite effective. His unique perspective as someone not

¹⁷⁵Balázs Szigeti is a PhD candidate writing his dissertation about Shakespeare, while also teaching English Renaissance Drama at Eötvös Loránd University. He has, in the past years created a highly successful amateur theater company at Eötvös Loránd University. He has directed Stoppard and Shakespeare as well as one of his own plays, and has played the roles of Puck and Hamlet on stage. He is currently learning from such masters as Tamás Ascher and Andrea Fullajtár.

¹⁷⁶ Marowitz 111.

hopelessly affected, not to say infected, by a devotion to the puppet theater renders his observations often more reliable than my own. The following analysis will include some of his reflections, recorded through the course of a number of discussions we had in 2011, during the process of developing the production.

Any artist or group deciding to try their hand at the puppet theater must be equipped with a strong knowledge of the basic rules, tools and possibilities of puppetry and need to understand in what ways puppetry differs from other performing media. It is not necessary, however, for all artists involved in the creation of a puppet performance to be puppeteers. There are numerous examples of directors of the live theater (Dezső Garas, Pál Mácsai, Péter Valló, Róbert Alföldi, Csaba Kiss, Zoltán Balázs, László Bagossy, etc.) who have produced successful performances on the puppet stage, and this is because they were able to bring a different and, in many cases, very exciting and productive way of thinking to the puppet theater, while the puppeteers themselves ensured that the rules of puppetry would be understood and observed. When I started working on the idea of a *Hamlet* adaptation, I felt confident enough in my understanding of the world of puppetry to believe that even without the control of a director specialized in the puppet theater I would not infringe upon the basic principles of the genre. In searching for a director with whom I could collaborate, I was not looking for someone to monitor the proper use of puppetry but rather, if anything, to watch over the ‘appropriate use of Shakespeare’.

This is not to suggest that I had any intention of abusing the Shakespearean original in any way (were it even possible to do such a thing), neither did I need anyone to ‘teach me proper respect’ for the play. It was precisely this respect that had kept me from attempting an adaptation of my own for many years. But admiration aside, I knew that I was hopelessly biased toward puppetry and I realized that without a counterweight to my way of thinking I would not only be left with a lopsided performance, but my work would also inevitably lead farther and farther away from Shakespeare, to the point where it would become meaningless to talk about an *adaptation* of Shakespeare as a creative but also *recognizable* interpretation of the play. What I truly needed was constant feedback from someone who knew and understood the play, and could tell me if what I deemed as a central conflict or the personal drama of a certain situation or character was still within the confines of an adaptation of the play or was simply the concoction of my own mind.

What I gained from the cooperation with Balázs Szigeti was much more than the controlling presence of a scholar who could warn me if I wondered too far from what was still recognizably Shakespeare. As it turned out, Szigeti not only understood my concept of

producing a Shakespeare play with puppets, with a single performer¹⁷⁷ and completely without text, but he instantly grasped that, rather than throwing away the text, this would mean somehow translating it to the language of a unique theatrical medium, and that this process would necessitate a familiarity with the play much like that of a translator working on a foreign language edition. I had not expected someone without much previous exposure to puppetry to see the possibilities as opposed to the obvious difficulties of such a performance, but Szigeti recognized that this approach would require the ability to analyze and reinterpret the drama even more than an adaptation for the live stage would, and as such, it was a challenge he was willing to take up.

The ability of the puppet theater to translate verbal metaphors to visual images is a trait I have discussed extensively in the previous chapters. I have been observing, analyzing and applying this quality of the genre since 1999, and it has always seemed that this was one of the greatest assets of puppetry. It was, therefore, a natural consequence for me to start working on the concept of a completely nonverbal *Hamlet*. As I have argued in chapter 3, because no ideal interpretation exists, and because the “original” dramatic text itself was already a unique intertextual combination of traditions and inventions, it is within the freedom of the adapting medium to decide how to allow for the audience to perceive the performance as a recognizable interpretation of Shakespeare’s original. If the puppet theater, owing to its unique tools, is able to achieve this effect using little or none of the text, and it can do so without the fear of damaging the false ‘ideal of an original’, then taking the direction of creating a nonverbal Hamlet may lead to a creative and interesting adaptation of the play. Having decided so, there was still, however, the problem of determining whether the

¹⁷⁷ Solo marionette performances have a long-standing tradition, with the first instances dating back to the 11th Century BC. The first artist to be recorded by name is the Chinese Jen-se, who performed in the court of King Muh. The first solo marionettist in Europe, although his name is unrecorded, is mentioned by Xenophone in 422 BC. European string marionettes gained great popularity around the 13th century together with morality plays and were (and are still) usually favored by groups rather than single players, due to the difficulty of manipulating more than one puppet at a time. However, there was a steady rise in the number of solo marionette players from the 16th century, and the art form reached its peak in popularity in England, France Italy, Spain, Bohemia and later in Hungary by the 18th century. Authors addressing the history of marionettes are Béla Szokolay, *A Marionett-játékról* (Műveltnép, (1953): 1-18.; David Currell, *The complete book of puppet theatre* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987); George Speaight, *The history of the English puppet theatre* (Carbondale : Southern Illinois University Press, 1990); Henryk Jurkowski, *A history of European puppetry* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998); John Bell, *Strings, hands, shadows: a modern puppet history* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Institute of Arts, 2000); George Latshaw, *The complete book of puppetry* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2000); Eileen Blumenthal, *Puppetry : a world history* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 2005); Penny Francis, *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.)) Today there are dozens of traveling solo marionette players around the world. The example and success of these artists show that the seemingly impossible exercise of having to do everything single handedly can be turned into an advantage (some of these advantages to be discussed later in this chapter).

technique I had envisioned for the performance, the string marionette, would indeed be entirely suitable for the task.

4.1.1. The question of technique: the idiom of the puppet stage III.

Whether string marionettes would be used in my own adaptation of *Hamlet* had never been a real question in my mind since it was precisely the possibilities in this particular technique that had originally given birth to the idea of *Re:Hamlet*. As a string puppet specialist I was convinced that the medial advantages of using marionettes would far outweigh the disadvantages. However, in our initial discussions with Szigeti and after developing the first few scenes, both of us realized that matters could be made significantly easier (and a number of technical problems would disappear) if we did not insist on using only string puppets in all of the scenes. Thus, the question whether string puppets were suitable for the task was refined to what it was exactly that string puppets are suitable for in the context of staging a Shakespearean tragedy. As it will be shown, much was to be gained by largely persisting in the use of this technique. The final decision in favor of using almost exclusively string marionettes and only occasionally applying other techniques, such as projected images (to strengthen the story line) and finger puppets (to serve, in a prologue, as a comic counterpoint to the scenes following it) has helped to create a unified visual world for the performance and has led to a number of solutions serving our interpretation of the play. Although working with string marionettes produces numerous difficulties, this technique has certain qualities no other type of puppet is in possession of, and these qualities can add so much to a performance aiming to translate the verbal poetry of Shakespeare to visual images as to make it worth the effort.

In the following then, I will show how the string marionette in particular can be a useful theatrical device when working with Shakespeare's plays. I will identify a set of tools unique to the string marionette, making it especially suitable for translating verbal poetry to the nonverbal medium of the puppet theater. As will be pointed out, the marionette (owing, in large part, to its elaborate relation to reality and abstraction)¹⁷⁸, more than any other type of puppet, is capable of expressing some of the most fundamental themes of many Shakespearean plays, such as power struggles, gaining or losing control over people, manipulating others,

¹⁷⁸ The question of realism and abstraction on the puppet stage was discussed extensively in Chapter 2. Here I will further consider the implications of realistic design and movement in relation to the string marionette in particular, in order to show how such technical aspects can influence dramatic interpretation.

being the victim of unavoidable circumstances and/or manipulation, and even pondering the meaning of life and death.

The most obvious quality that sets marionettes aside from all other forms of puppetry is the fact that the string marionette is among the rarest of all techniques. This is true even in countries where string puppets have a long-standing tradition and, thus, one would expect the marionette to be the predominant technique of the region. Such strongholds of marionette culture are, just to mention a few, the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany and Russia, but even in these countries only a small minority of puppeteers specialize in string marionettes.¹⁷⁹ Although different periods of the history of the puppet theater favored different types of puppets (glove puppets, rod puppets, table top puppets, bunraku, black light theater, shadow puppets and object animation, just to mention some of the most important ones), and each geographical region has had its various traditional techniques, the inferior position of string puppetry worldwide is and has always been due to technical rather than historical or geographical factors. In simple terms, as Czech puppeteer, designer and teacher of puppetry Alois Tománek observes in *Podoby Loutky* [*Forms of Puppets* (my translation)], a technical treatment of most known puppet forms, “Performing with string marionettes is one of the most difficult disciplines in the field of puppet theater”.¹⁸⁰

Marionettes are puppets manipulated from above and can be placed into two major categories: the rod marionette (with a fixed and rigid rod attached to the head, with strings optionally operating limbs) and string marionettes (with no rods but only strings controlling all parts of the body).¹⁸¹ The movement of the string marionette is often characterized by the

¹⁷⁹ Most nations can boast with only one or two masters of the style, or none at all. I am, of course, speaking only of those performers who have had the opportunity to show their art on the international scene, since there may be a number of outstanding marionette players we simply do not know about. Thanks to mobile video uploads, one may find more and more of these thus far unknown marionette artists on the Internet; performers whose skills would surely merit international attention, and with the aid of the Internet ever more artists are, in fact, accounted for in the world of puppetry. The fact remains, however, that even though we cannot be sure how many marionette players there are in the world, this technique is the least favored among puppeteers.

¹⁸⁰ Alois Tománek. *Podoby Loutky*. Praha: Akademie múzických umění v Praze, 2001. (44). (My translation). As Penny Francis explains, “All puppets are difficult to operate well but (arguably) the string puppet is the most difficult. To operate one convincingly needs rigorous practice, although few attempt to equal the level of skill of the traditional Chinese marionettist, severely trained from youth, who develops manual dexterity born of many hours of painful exercises” (54). This is not to say that truly mastering one form of puppetry requires less practice than mastering another. Here I am speaking about the fact that it is the initial difficulties of animating a marionette that discourage many from even starting, leading them to choose other techniques to master instead.

¹⁸¹ The manipulation of the puppet may be achieved through a control or cross, a structure typically made of wood or metal and designed to hold and allow for the movement of the strings, or by directly holding and pulling on the strings. The movement of the rod marionette (most notably prevalent in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries in Sicily and the Czech Republic and still occasionally used in performances today) is “less fluid, more definite than that of its string counterpart”, as Penny Francis very aptly observes (50). In the case of the true string marionette there is no rigid connection between actor and puppet, all movement is achieved through the manipulation of strings.

ethereal quality Kleist talks about in his essay on marionettes (quoted earlier in Chapter 2), a kind of lightness and fluidity, but also a measure of wobbliness and unpredictability, all of which make it extremely difficult to manipulate precisely, but which add strongly to the magic of the technique and lend character to the puppets. As has been mentioned above, this characteristic of the string puppet can come to be a tool of interpretation in an adaptation of Shakespeare. The expression of the battle between the will of the manipulator and the disobedience of the puppet may prove an especially relevant metaphor of the conflict between the Creator and man as the defiant creation, and in light of the prevalent philosophical, religious and scientific debate of free will in Shakespeare's own time, a marionette adaptation is able to add new meaning to the moral choices made by Hamlet, Macbeth, Richard III or Prospero, for example.

The appeal of the string marionette is, as was explained in Chapter 2, that in its appearance, its awkward gracefulness and its erratic nature it is the closest representation of a human being. This similarity to man, however, is not only the source of endless possibilities, but if formed into a demand of imitation, may also become a serious handicap for string marionettes, as has been explained earlier. In the puppet art of the Western world two opposing tendencies have been at odds with one another for the last three hundred years, and this duality has been and is still most obvious in the case of the string marionette. Although many authors on the aesthetic of the puppet, such as Meyerhold, Efimova, Baird, Bell or Tillis, have expressed concerns with basing the art of puppetry on imitation, I have claimed that the tradition of imitational marionette theater lives on in the marionette opera and has considerable appeal to audiences even today. On the one hand, the view that the task of a puppet cannot be to prove human but, by its inherent human-like qualities, to symbolize the absurdity, comedy and tragedy of the human condition¹⁸² seems well founded. On the other hand, no marionette artist can disregard the fact that the obvious similarities to man make the eternal attractions of the technique.

The marionette, then, can hold up a mirror to man, but it can also present not just a mirror, but a crooked looking glass in which one may see images of oneself incomparably

¹⁸² Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]) explains that 'the human condition' is not the same as human nature, but rather refers to the actions of man in a given environment. She brings the example that if man were to inhabit a new planet with different conditions, human nature might not change, but 'the human condition', and thereby human actions would 10. It is in this sense of the term; of circumstances (as unavoidable for the protagonist of a tragedy as the conditions are for the inhabitants of a planet) inducing action, that I employ it. As Arendt says, "The human condition is such that pain and effort are not just symptoms which can be removed without changing life itself; they are rather the modes in which life itself, together with the necessity to which it is bound, makes itself felt. For mortals, the "easy life of the gods" would be a lifeless life" 120.

more interesting than the pictures produced by undistorted reflections. Having such a unique tool at hand, the task of the marionette artist seems to be to find creative ways of showing the world from the unusual, sometimes imitative, at other times warped, often exaggerated point of view of the uncannily human-like object which can, at times, make the audience believe it is no different from them and at others, seem like a being far removed from the reality of life. Since the possibility for a high measure of realistic depiction is a quality that distinguishes string puppets from other techniques, while abstraction is one of the defining principles of all of puppetry, it is, in great part, the position it takes along the scale of realism and abstraction that defines the individual style of each Shakespearean puppet adaptation that uses marionettes. But how exactly can one present these concepts on the puppet stage? And how will this perception ultimately affect a puppet theater adaptation of Shakespeare? In order to answer these questions, one must first understand how the audience perceives the puppet as a theatrical tool.

In the world of the semiotics and aesthetics of the puppet theater, there has been an ongoing debate about the nature of the puppet itself since the middle of the 20th century. The debate was, and to some extent still is, concerned with explaining those factors that define the puppet itself, and whether this inanimate object is perceived by the audience as a thing, a person or something entirely different. On the question of *what the puppet actually is* there is still much disagreement between scholars. However, in the framework of the theory and practice of puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare, the question is not so much what a puppet is – although I will briefly touch upon this problem, too – but what it can do, that is, how the puppet affects the audience and how the audience perceives the puppet. In this respect it is a description of Steve Tillis that will take us closer to understanding how the tools of realism and abstraction can affect the way the audience sees the puppet. As Tillis writes,

In the course of the performance, the audience sees the puppet, through perception and through imagination, as an object and as a life; that is, it sees the puppet in two ways at once. A constant tension exists within this double vision created by the puppet: each of the puppet's aspects is inescapable, and yet each contradicts the other. [...] This double vision is a constant in all puppet performances, whether intentionally or not, and thus provides the basis for a synchronic explanation of the puppet's widespread and enduring appeal, for it creates in every audience the pleasure of a profound and illuminating paradox provoked by an "object" with "life".¹⁸³

¹⁸³Tillis 65.

According to Tillis, the puppet is object and living at the same time, and it is precisely the tension created by this duality that accounts for the representational power of the puppet theater. The task of the puppeteer, then, is to make the most of this tension in order to achieve maximum theatrical effect, and to do so, he or she must have a very conscious approach to the duality of the living and the lifeless, the real and the abstract. This conscious approach to creating theatrical effect gains significance in the context of adaptations of Shakespeare because reflecting upon the code of the representing medium is an important element of both Shakespeare's plays (e.g. the metatheatrical function of the play within the play in *Hamlet* or the monologues of *Richard III* addressing the audience and thereby revealing the theatricality of the situation) and puppetry (the visible technique of manipulation revealing the mechanical nature of the medium). The puppet stage, like many of Shakespeare's plays, always, inevitably and self-reflexively foregrounds its own mediality and constructedness.

The source of the constructedness and self-reflexivity of the puppet theater is the audience's perception of the puppet, an inanimate object, as an object with life. The source of this perception, in turn, is to be found in two factors: the *design* and the *movement* of the puppet. Any inanimate object, even a tin can or a shoe, may become a puppet if the puppeteer animates it by giving it movement and thereby giving it life (or rather the illusion of life) and character.¹⁸⁴ Although movement is an essential element of the process of creating the illusion of life for all kinds of puppets, puppets based on an actual design (as opposed to object puppets) will call for a much lower level of cooperation on the part of the audience. While it undoubtedly takes a measure of willingness to suspend our disbelief even when faced with puppets that are recognizably human, accepting a shoe as a living, feeling character is clearly a more complicated process. Nevertheless, as I will show in the final chapter, this technique also holds possibilities for adapting Shakespeare.

Although the type and style of puppet a certain adaptation employs is central to any puppet theater staging of a Shakespeare drama, design and technique are not all of what puppetry can use to facilitate an interpretation of a play. Besides design, I have repeatedly mentioned the other major factor allowing for to the animation of the inanimate: movement. Although artists may choose to employ similar or opposing tools of design and movement

¹⁸⁴ In the case of object animation, where everyday objects are used as puppets, we can speak of design only as far as the puppeteer chooses an object that, in its appearance, already suggests a character or resembles a person or animal. For example, the audience will easily accept a slender flagon as a swan or a bulky bottle as a stout man if the puppeteer animates it skillfully. In object animation, abstraction almost completely outweighs realism, since it is only through the combined imagination of player and spectator that such objects are perceived as living, to the extent that in most cases the spectator will not recognize the object as a character at all until it is given movement.

within a single performance, irrespective of the level of abstraction or realism, all quality performances must certainly be characterized by faultless manipulation. Faultless manipulation does not refer to a perfect imitation of human movement, but rather to the perfection in finding the most suitable movements for each character, and performing these movements with the utmost precision. Nothing breaks the magic of the puppet theater like a flawed movement, a misconstrued momentum or an unintended gesture.

The most decisive and most difficult technique of marionette manipulation (and least favorite basic exercise of students of puppetry) is ‘touching the ground’. This refers to the requirement that a figure stand, walk and exist on the stage in a way that it is neither flying above the ground nor squatting or stooping in his movements.¹⁸⁵ If one considers *what* the relation of the ground and the puppet signifies in a performance, it is easy to understand why ‘touching the ground’ is such a central aspect of marionette manipulation. If a figure stands with stooped shoulders or walks with bent knees, this kind of behavior can have physical causes, such as being old or tired or carrying some kind of physical weight. At the same time, it can also have psychological reasons, such as carrying the emotional weight of desperation, shame, or bereavement, among many other examples.¹⁸⁶ This is precisely what Szigeti and I play with in a scene based on *Richard III*, part of a new production to be discussed in Chapter 5. The posture of Richard changes throughout the scene, expressing his status as well as his state of mind. *Exit Hamlet*, analyzed in the previous chapter, although with a type of tabletop puppet rather than with a marionette, also uses the same technique of changing the posture of the figure in a scene with Claudius to express his growing confidence in coming to power. *Exit* manages to translate Claudius’ opening speech to the language of design and movement through the use of this technique (among others).

Similarly to playing with posture, moving the marionette away from the ground can also signify a number of different physical or mental states. The freedom of the marionette from the confines of natural laws will mean that if, for instance, a puppet is euphoric it can literally walk on air. The spectator willingly accepts the physical reality the performer offers in the first moments of the show. If a puppet arrives on the stage flying, there will be no question in anyone’s mind that this particular character can really fly, and therefore every movement that contradicts this reality, by having the puppet fall to the ground, for example, will gain

¹⁸⁵ This may sound trivial at first, but it is my experience as puppeteer, spectator and teacher that while learning complex motions with a string marionette, like sitting down or walking, can be achieved in a relatively short time, for most puppeteers it will take years of practice before they can consistently keep their puppets on the ground.

¹⁸⁶ This is why if a stooped posture or a crooked walk is merely the result of imperfect manipulation, the performer is communicating a false message to the audience.

significance and meaning. Correspondingly, if the puppet walks onto the stage and then unexpectedly starts hovering above the ground, the audience will try to assign meaning to this change in the internal logic of the show. The Bulgarian production of *Hamlet* discussed in the previous chapter is full of examples of expressing states of mind by having the marionettes resist gravity. When Polonius tries to speak with Hamlet as he is reading, for example, Hamlet hovers above his book as though a measure of insanity could lend someone the power to defy not only the norms of society but also the laws of physics. Correspondingly, when Ophelia goes mad, she flies above the heads of everyone with a complete disregard for reality.

The interaction between the physical world and the puppet is, thus, an issue all puppeteers adapting Shakespeare are faced with and will have to decide how to relate to. When working with string marionettes, however, the issue becomes even more pronounced than it does with other techniques, since the marionette is so close in its appearance to humans, that one would instinctively expect it to behave, more than any other type of puppet, like a human. This expectation can force the marionette theater into the pigeonhole of imitation, which, as has been explained earlier, limits the possibilities of representation. The same expectation, however, can also open up new possibilities, since not meeting expectations may, in itself, become a tool for interpretation, as was shown in by the possibilities of playing with gravity.

If the elements of realistic/nonfigurative design and naturalistic/abstract movement are combined in a way that enforces a given interpretation, the resulting performance may intensify the inherent tension that arises from the contrast between the living and the lifeless, and thereby indeed add something exceptional to the spectators' "Shakespearean experience". The source of this tension is the fact that at times one may see marionettes looking like people but acting nothing like us whereas at other times these figures act like people while one can clearly recognize them as mechanical and inanimate. If the spectator abandons himself to the most ancient convention of the puppet theater, i.e. that he accepts the puppet as a person, he will be surprised how at times the marionette is capable of things both different and more than what a real person can do. If, however, the spectator views the marionette as a technical contraption and does not allow himself to forget about the strings and the manipulator, he will be surprised how precisely this inanimate figure can imitate life. It is a wicked trick the marionette theater can play on the audience, and yet, the farther such tricks lead us from being able to perceive the puppet as clearly living or clearly lifeless, the more possibilities open up

for interpreting dramatic material. The “profound and illuminating paradox”¹⁸⁷ of animating the inanimate can add further meaning to a marionette Richard III ruthlessly cutting away the strings of other marionettes, the wooden figures of Oberon and Puck playing God in their own private psycho-social experiment of the Athenian forest inhabited by puppets, or an inanimate Hamlet looking at his own strings and pondering the questions of life and death.

4.1.2. Marionettes in *Re:Hamlet* – design and movement

As has been shown, the string puppet is a wonderfully versatile theatrical tool capable of creating the illusion of the object with life. This illusion provides an additional layer to the traditional sense of the theater spectators’ “willing suspension of disbelief” since here the audience does not only accept that events on stage are to be interpreted as real but also perceives the performer, an inanimate object as having life. The ability of the marionette to stand as both concrete representation and as abstract symbol of man offers a unique perspective for presenting the drama of the human condition and thereby presenting Shakespearean plays. In the following I will discuss how *Re:Hamlet* makes use of this dual quality of the string marionette in adapting Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The specific tools and methods of staging as well as the questions of dramaturgy will be discussed in the next section; here the aim is to show how the technique of the string marionette, as a tool of interpretation, has been applied in the performance.

The first aspect of the discussion of the puppets, as well as the first step in creating the marionettes themselves, is design. As has been mentioned earlier, the puppets in *Re:Hamlet* were designed by Judit Wunder, who in 2011 was a student of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, majoring in Puppet Design. Our concept with the design was to create figures whose appearance already suggests some of the major traits of each character. Some important aspects of the protagonists are emphasized in order to give the marionettes recognizable, even archetypical personalities. On the imaginary scale of realistic and abstract design the marionettes of *Re:Hamlet* can be placed near the middle, somewhat closer to the realistic end. All the puppets are recognizable characters of the drama, with detailed facial expressions and elaborately jointed, anatomically human-like figures. They are, however, also caricatures to some extent, with often exaggerated features, and the fact that no effort has been made to conceal the mechanics, the strings, the controls or the puppeteer manipulating the marionettes

¹⁸⁷Tillis 65.

further emphasizes the unreal, mechanic nature of the visual world of the performance.

The treatment of movement in *Re:Hamlet* followed two distinct concepts. As has been mentioned before, the play was, for the most part, performed with string marionettes. In some scenes, however, we did apply other techniques, such as a large floating head (manipulated from the back) with mechanics for changing facial expressions for the Ghost; finger puppets for the prologue; and comically oversimplified, palm-size string puppets for the Mousetrap scene. In these scenes we allowed for exaggerated, sometimes highly stylized movement. There is inherently little realism in a floating, disembodied head, nor is there much room for precise and lifelike expression with finger puppets or marionettes constructed from a napkin and a Ping-Pong ball and therefore, it would have been futile to strive for sophisticated manipulation with these puppets. In those scenes, however, where true string marionettes took center stage, we took pains to refine the movements and worked toward clear gestures and individual characterization of motions with each figure.

Hamlet in this performance is an entirely different type of marionette from all others. He is represented by a small, nonfigurative, white marionette with no facial features, barely a fifth of the size of the other puppets, and he has no scene of his own. He is a spectator and an occasional actor in the story presented by the other characters, a story which revolves around him and without him. This interpretation is similar to that of *Exit* where the title character barely ever appears in the performance, and when he does, he is completely different from the others (in *Exit* the occasionally materializing Hamlet is the puppeteer himself). In *Re:Hamlet* the hero watches the show from the sideline and only enters the stage at the very end to take his place among the dead characters in the carnage of the final scene. It is the other players that present the major themes and motifs of the play, and the fact that this is done without the active participation of the title character further emphasizes the idea that Hamlet, the hero, exists outside his story, within the minds and memories of the other players, just as *Hamlet*, the play, exists outside its text.

One of the more prominently featured characters in the performance is Claudius, designed with a disproportionately large head (he is literally big-headed), a sly expression and a right hand that seems to be rotten, almost alien to the body of the king. Claudius is in constant struggle with this twitching, at times independently acting hand and this struggle represents his fight in trying to distance himself from, but never actually managing to rid himself of, his guilt in murdering his brother.

What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,

Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? (3.3.47-50)

His movements are, at first, highly stylized and artificial; his posture and gestures are the quintessence of the monarch who is conscious of his people watching him. This, then, is in stark contrast with the uncontrollable and unconscious spasms of his murderous hand, and with the unaffected gestures he later displays when he knows he is alone. This duality in Claudius' movements is a visual representation of his ability to "smile, and smile, and be a villain" (1.5.846).

Gertrude is a once beautiful but now jaded character who is gradually crushed by her son's anger, her fear for Hamlet's safety and sanity, and, after being faced with the truth, her recognition of the immorality of her own choices. Her clothes are reminiscent of the person she was at the beginning of the play: a vain, sensual, sexual creature preoccupied with her renewed, reinvigorated status as queen of a strong and dynamic king. Her features, her posture and her empty gaze, however, all suggest a kind of broken quality; in *Re:Hamlet* we see Gertrude after she discovers the darkness in her heart.

Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct (3.4.100-102)

Gertrude is intelligent enough to recognize (although only after a direct confrontation, and a detailed explanation of the problematic nature of her behavior, by Hamlet) her guilt and depravity, but she is not strong enough to cope with these feelings. She is emotionally crushed by her inability to manage the situation and it is this broken quality that is emphasized in the design of her character.

The character of Polonius posed a serious problem for the adaptation since the source of comedy in his character is largely his language. While the slapstick comedy of Trinculo and Stephano in *The Tempest*, or the highly visual mishaps of the four lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may be more easily adapted to the language of design and movement, the verbal miscreations of Polonius are nearly impossible to reproduce in a nonverbal medium. The problem of adapting Shakespearean comedy to the puppet stage will be addressed in detail in the next chapter, it can be stated at this point, however, that the specific framework of a nonverbal puppet theater is not the ideal agent for translating verbal comedy. Nevertheless, the character of Polonius has certain traits that are independent from his ingenious inanity with words and which may be given to a puppet through its design and movement, such as a pompous manner, a comic appearance and the potential for being in the wrong place at the

wrong time.

It is my observation that nonverbal comedy on the puppet stage has two sources, both of which stem from the ambiguous relationship of the inanimate object to realistic design and movement. One source of comedy is based on the puppet's similarity to, while the other arises from its dissimilarity from humans, but the key to both kinds of humor is unexpectedness. If a puppet, and especially a marionette, is able to mimic our most human traits and imperfections, this is not only interesting but also quite comical. The source of the comedy here is the parodistic nature of a miniature figure attempting to reproduce the gestures and attitudes of an actor to the finest detail. While puppets can, at times indeed copy the live theater almost perfectly, the limitations of the inanimate object will inevitably render many attempts at impersonation crude and often ridiculous, thus, the audience will appreciate both the uncanny precision of certain gestures and the clumsy coarseness of others. This was precisely our concept regarding the figure of Polonius: we presented him as a caricature of the knowledgeable counselor he sees himself as, playing upon the discrepancy between the way he perceives himself and the raw and clumsy reality of how he is seen by Hamlet ("These tedious old fools" (2.2.237)) and Gertrude ("More matter with less art" (2.2.103)). Performances based on the imitation of the live stage almost always achieve great effect and evoke amused laughter from the audience, however, this feeling of amusement rarely lasts for long. When the initial surprise and delight of seeing puppets look and act like people wears off, the performance becomes largely repetitive and the comic effect quickly diminishes. This is where puppetry can introduce another type of comedy; the similarly unexpected moments when the puppet performs actions a human being, and thus, the live stage would not be capable of, or when it violates the physical laws of the given performance.¹⁸⁸ Both sources of comic effect in the puppet theater – realism turning into its own parody and absurdity accomplishing the impossible – can, in themselves become uninteresting relatively quickly. At the time of creating *Re:Hamlet* I had not yet understood that the key to maintaining the attention of the audience may be in employing a well-balanced combination of the two types of comic effect. While the contrast between the precise imitativeness and parodistic crudeness of Polonius's character did present a certain measure of comedy, there may have been additional opportunities for strengthening the comic effect by introducing elements of absurd impossibilities.

¹⁸⁸ The tradition of the marionette circus, for instance, where the puppets perform typical circus acts like those of the tightrope walker, the lion tamer, the strongman, the juggler or the acrobat, builds precisely on this type of comedy, because each number contains some kind of twist which, with its blatant impossibility and disregard of natural laws or logic, removes it from the recognized reality of the live circus.

4.2. Staging *Re:Hamlet*: tools and methodology

The third question (after *why* and *what*) one needs to address when working on a puppet theater adaptation of a Shakespearean play is *how*, i.e., ‘how can the puppet stage lend new relevance and actuality to the text and how can the play be suited for the puppet stage in light of the potential horizons of expectations of the audience’. In the following I will try to answer this third question and show the tools and methods applied in staging *Re:Hamlet*.

Each medium has its own set of tools, and finding the ones most suitable for achieving a given effect will not only define the individual style, but ultimately the success of the final product. But how does one start working on an adaptation at all? Firstly, the director of the puppet theater, just as the director of the theater or film, will have to decide where to place the emphasis and how to best reconcile the values of the Shakespearean play and the values of the performing medium. Just as in the case of the cinema where the director has to translate some, or even most of the words to pictures and action, the puppet theater will also need to create its own ‘screenplay’. As Syd Field, one of the greatest names in screenwriting today observes: “a screenplay is a story from play-script to screenplay told in pictures, and there will always be some kind of problem when you tell the story through words, and not pictures”.¹⁸⁹ The starting point for the ‘screenplay’ of *Re:Hamlet* was the understanding that the puppet theater, just like the cinema, has a unique ability to tell a story in pictures and action: to translate verbal poetry into visual imagery and movement. In terms of the semiotics of the puppet the reason for this ability is that, as discussed earlier, the puppet itself is primarily distinguished from other, non-performing, inanimate objects by the *signs of design and movement*, while the *sign of speech* is only an optional constituent of the puppet.

The creation of *Re:Hamlet* was based on the understanding that puppetry can work most effectively by employing the tools of the graphic arts as well as those of dance and pantomime to translate verbal poetry into visual imagery and movement. One cannot, however, take all the metaphors, allegories and rhetorical structures in *Hamlet*, the 184 different types of figures of speech as defined and categorized by Henry Peacham,¹⁹⁰ and simply ‘draw a picture’ or ‘construct a choreography’ from each one. One needs to find suitable methods for the process of translation to the idiom of puppetry. One such method was

¹⁸⁹ Qtd. in Russel Jackson, “From play-script to screenplay” *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film: Second Edition*. Ed. Russell Jackson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 16.

¹⁹⁰ Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence*, 1577 (London: British Library, Historical Print Editions, 2011)

the use of a technique originally aimed at developing puppeteers' ability to substitute words with non-verbal signs and borrowed from the teaching repertoire of the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts in Berlin.¹⁹¹

The process starts out with a puppeteer performing a monologue or selected lines from a longer speech, for example part of the "O, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt" (1.2.133) soliloquy of *Hamlet*. Whenever a puppeteer performs a text, it is of course the puppet that is performing. The puppeteer animates the inanimate object, and gives his own words to the puppet, placing it in the spotlight and himself in the background. For students of puppetry or actors new to the world of the puppet theater this in itself is immensely difficult, because one has to repress the natural urge to communicate feelings and thoughts through one's own movements, gestures and facial expressions. Once all the metacommunicative elements of the scene are successfully given to the puppet, comes the exercise of eliminating the text. The actor now speaks only the first half of every line with the aim of expressing the same feelings, the same dramatic content with the puppet as before. When this is achieved, he continues with speaking only the first word of every line, then only the first word of every sentence. Finally, he will act out the whole scene with only the first and last lines of the monologue spoken.

This technique is quite useful when trying to teach students how the tools of puppetry can be effectively applied in translating the signs of one medium into the signs of another. It is, however, difficult enough even when the object is translating only a few lines. How can it work then, if the material to translate is an entire play? The answer is that the technique (or rather a methodology based on this technique) could be effective since it was never the objective of *Re:Hamlet* to translate the entire play, as it is rarely the intention of any adaptation to use the complete, uncut text. Any version of the play prepared for any type of performance will be inevitably and intentionally different from the written text, and because of this, differences between adaptations will not only be defined by the visible differences in the interpretative media or by the various ways directors use scenery, lights, actors, puppets or the camera, but also by the differences in the text of their screenplay. Speaking of directing *Hamlet* for the stage Trevor Nunn, former Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal National Theatre and currently of the Theatre Royal, explains that

¹⁹¹ This is a method that, with some variation, I now use in my work as a teacher of puppetry. The technique had been explained to me by puppet director Ágnes Kuthy, graduate of the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts. The version presented here is my own.

“the cutting is virtually the production. What you decide to leave in is your version of the play”.¹⁹²

This is obviously true for all productions that use some version of the actual text, but in the case of a puppet adaptation which aims at making the most of its potential for translating verbal material into images and movement, it may seem that every single word, every sentence, every soliloquy or dialogue that has been translated to this other medium has, effectively, been cut since it will not appear as text in the performance. This, however, is not the case, because translation and cutting are not the same notions but different processes that can and should be applied consecutively. When the director of the live theater decides to cut lines, those lines are actually left out and will most likely not appear in any form in the performance. The fact that only some lines, few lines or even no lines at all are *spoken* in a puppet performance, however, does not necessarily mean that the entire text was cut. Cutting is part of the process of adaptation, but it happens before intersemiotic (and, at the same time, intermedial) translation.

The director of the puppet theater will have to prepare a version of the text from which he can start working on the translation to the sign system of the adapting medium. This is what Szigeti and I did: we prepared a text variant for *Re:Hamlet* containing all the elements we intended to include, and omitting those scenes, speeches and dialogues which were not central to our interpretation. The version thus achieved was what one may call the script of the performance, a play-book similar to what any dramaturge or director of the live stage or the cinema would prepare for an adaptation. This script essentially kept the structure of acts and scenes (albeit with some rearrangement), it contained dialogues and monologues, and, had it been performed and spoken on the live stage, it would have made for a two-hour performance.

The final length of the puppet performance based on this play-book was just under one hour. This, however, does not mean that an additional half of the already edited text was cut during the process of adaptation. What accounts for the shortening of performance time is the fact that the language of the puppet theater is more concise than spoken language, because it is able to express complex metaphors, sentences, even entire dialogues or speeches with a few images or movements. This is not to suggest, of course, that every single word of the script was translated to the idiom of puppetry without any loss of information. Even in the case of intralingual or interlingual translation (as described by Jakobson) there will be some loss of information as well as the inevitable addition of new layers of meaning due to differences in

¹⁹² Qtd. in Kidnie 35.

the source and target languages. In the case of intersemiotic translation, or translation to a nonverbal sign system, this will be true many times over, and thus, it would be an illusion to expect a perfect translation of the text. The puppet theater cannot paraphrase the text but it can paraphrase the experience, thereby creating an *instance of the play*, rather than a mirror translation of the words. What the puppet theater can strive for is to know and understand the text as thoroughly as possible; to find those elements of the drama that are presentable (and at times, presentable only) by the tools of puppetry; and to create an instance of the play that makes the drama relevant and thus, of interest to its audience.

As has been argued earlier, the role of the director, rather than attempting to become a mouthpiece for the author, is to sift ideas through his own thoughts, beliefs and knowledge and produce a creative interpretation of the play. Accordingly, imaginative output, as opposed to fidelity to the ideal of an original, should be the primary aim of any adaptation. While this argument may seem compelling in many regards, it is still questionable whether the lack of creativity is the only cause for suffering, as Marowitz says, “humiliation and disgrace”¹⁹³ in the theater. It is quite feasible that many spectators will express their displeasure over a boring, unimaginative recital, but it is just as likely that some will feel cheated if the title suggests an *adaptation* of William Shakespeare, and all they get is a baffling performance that, albeit very original, lacks any tangible connection to Shakespeare’s play (cf. the requirements of the definition for *adaptation* I provided in Chapter 1). However difficult or even impossible it may appear for scholars and directors to draw a definite line between the adaptation of an existing original and an entirely new work, the spectator of any performance will always *feel* when he is faced with one or the other.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, appealing as it may seem for an artist to proclaim the theater’s right to do whatever it pleases, it cannot claim to perform a consciously labeled *adaptation* of Shakespeare without actually striving throughout the performance to maintain a recognizable connection to, if not the text, but its idea of the play itself.

Maintaining this connection to Shakespeare’s greatest tragedy in an adaptation that works by translating the drama to the sign system of a nonverbal medium had seemed quite an intimidating challenge for the creators of *Re:Hamlet*. Even with the understanding that it was not only the *words* but also the *drama*, the play with its *independent life*, the *cultural entity*

¹⁹³ Marowitz 72.

¹⁹⁴ If the majority of the spectators feel they have been promised an adaptation of Shakespeare but they cannot identify those elements of the performance that take them back to the recognition of the play, the performance will probably be a failure. The same performance may then be an unequivocal success in another environment, with a different audience, but rather than blaming the ignorance of an entire group of people, it is worth taking a moment to consider if perhaps the connection with a recognizable original was not fully maintained.

existing outside its text, the *Hamlet phenomenon* that we would be working with, the first and most difficult task was letting go of the entire text without losing sight of the play. For someone like Balázs Szigeti, who had directed and played the lead role of *Hamlet* in the live theater, having a performance without speaking any of the lines must have seemed unorthodox, if not straight insane. After all, what remains of Shakespeare if we take away his words? Charles Marowitz, who never produced a Shakespeare play entirely without text, nor does he ever mention such an intention, provides an important insight as to what we might find, or even look for in Shakespeare, other than the text itself. He writes:

Language itself is no longer the plays' essential ingredient. It is their metaphysic, their subterranean imagery, that means most to us today. We are interested in Hamlet, not because of what he says, but because of the way the character connects with our own 20th century sense of impotence and confusion.¹⁹⁵

It is the images of the play, reinterpreted by each generation, and the associations connected to the story and the characters that we are looking for, and which have made Shakespeare's plays new, exciting and thought provoking for over four centuries. These images and associations, as has been explained, have been separated from the text and live on as individual elements of our cultural heritage in a repository of motifs that arts of all genres can and will draw on. This repository of motifs is what, in great part, constitutes the dramatic content¹⁹⁶ of the play, and it is the ability of the puppet theater to express the dramatic content with using its own unique set of tools that served as the starting point for staging *Re:Hamlet*. Iconic motifs, such as the poison, the duel or the skull in *Hamlet*, for example, are images with connotations just as strong as those of the text. These iconic motifs are, as Maynard Mack explains in *Everybody's Shakespeare*, "eloquent moments that his plays have etched on the whole world's consciousness, moments that speak to the human condition as such".¹⁹⁷ To illustrate one of the most "eloquent moments" Mac brings the example of Hamlet standing in the graveyard with Yorik's skull in his hand, about which Szigeti observes that "even though there is no textual indication of Hamlet ever taking Yorik's skull into his hand, the picture of a pensive young man with a skull in his hand is just as much a part of our knowledge of the play as the words "to be or not to be" (3.1.64).¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Marowitz 59.

¹⁹⁶ The dramatic content of a play is, of course, itself always in motion, changing with every age and cultural environment the play is performed in. This is an opportunity for the theater (as it can reflect upon those elements of the play that are relevant to its own time and social setting) but also a difficulty (as a performance may be received entirely differently in a cultural environment different from where it was produced).

¹⁹⁷ Mack 2.

¹⁹⁸ Szigeti 2011

Puppetry can make use of our recognition of these iconic images (regardless of whether they are actually in the text or only in our *knowledge of the play*), and thus, can stage certain textual or cultural images as actual, moving pictures. To take a concrete example from *Re:Hamlet*, let us look at its treatment of the fact that Claudius is not only the murderer, but also the only living witness of his crime, a motif understood but unstated in the text of *Hamlet*. There is no direct textual reference to this fact, and even if the director of the live theater decided that the dual position of Claudius, effecting his reaction to the performance directed by Hamlet was important to emphasize, it would be very difficult to do so without adding some lines to the Shakespearean text to explain this idea. As the methodology of *Re:Hamlet* was finding and translating motifs, images and metaphors, whether explicit or implied, the puppet performance was able to make use of the opportunity to express something the reader of the text or the spectator of a live theater production would only be able to speculate upon.

After the Mousetrap scene in *Re:Hamlet*, images of the actual murder of Old Hamlet are projected from Claudius's eyes onto a white material, which, in a previous scene, served as the body of Old Hamlet's ghost. This, combined with sudden darkness and the only light coming from the king's eyes, and the opening bars of the Commendatore aria from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, effectively expresses Claudius's state of mind as he rises from his seat and gasps: "Give me some light: away!" (3.2.295), and at the same time conveys the implied understanding that the memory of the murder only exists within Claudius's mind, and when he sees the play he is confronted with this knowledge.

While the methodology of translating the play to images and movement is apparently possible to apply to the most revered instances of verbal poetry and even to covert motifs of the drama, as has been shown, it may occasionally happen that only the translators themselves understand the references in the performance. Whether a spectator interprets the above scene as the manifestation of the words spoken by Claudius after the mousetrap scene, as intended by the creators, or as something entirely different remains completely unknown unless one decides to ask each member of the audience to recount what they grasped from the events on the stage. Although in *Re:Hamlet* the consequences of the mousetrap scene become obvious enough without much explanation, even here it is conceivable that not everyone may see the direct connection between the text and the staging, or that some will make connections the producers of the performance would never have imagined. Although the recipient is entitled to interpret any work of art as he pleases, it is nevertheless important that the director of the theater provide some kind of clue as to what his own interpretation is. The creators of

Re:Hamlet knew that although the method of translating the text to the nonverbal sign system of puppetry might be an interesting and viable approach to staging Shakespeare, only those most knowledgeable in the plot and text of *Hamlet* would be able to fully follow the dramaturgy of the performance and connect all the scenes with the lines on which they had been based. Precisely because of the existence of the “independent life of *Hamlet*” I have talked about extensively, most people believe they know the play; however, it is only very few who actually *do know* the entire drama and can thus interpret a dramaturgy that does not follow the story itself.

In order to refresh the audience’s occasionally blurred recollection of the play Szigeti and I had decided to include a prologue in which the very essentials of the *Hamlet*-story would be presented. This prologue became a five-minute, condensed dumb show, much like the one presented to Claudius and the court before the verbal performance of *The Murder of Gonzago*. This comical show within the show in *Re:Hamlet* introduces the characters and, although in a parodistic manner, carefully follows the dramaturgy of Shakespeare’s original, thus allowing for those with somewhat faded memories to get reacquainted with the plot of the play without making anyone feel that they were being tutored.¹⁹⁹ After the first few performances of *Re:Hamlet*, however, and specifically following an appearance at a festival in Pinerolo, Italy in June 2011, it became clear that something more than just the prologue would be needed in order for the methodology of *Re:Hamlet* to truly work in practice. I had known from the beginning that not everyone would recognize all of the references in the performance, but I had not found it important that all spectators follow my interpretation. The fact was, however, that a large part of the audience felt they were expected to follow a train of thought to which not enough information was provided.²⁰⁰ The lesson learned from these first performances was that we needed to give some additional indication as to where we were within the story of the play and to which part of the text the given scene was a reference.

The solution was to use lines from the text projected onto a black wing drape. In those moments of the performance when the stage was being reset for the next scene, we projected lines that were central to the theme of what was to follow.²⁰¹ Thus, for example, the words projected before the mousetrap scene, after which the events described above take place, are

¹⁹⁹ This opening dumb show has some similarities to Nola Rae’s adaptation discussed earlier, but while Rae tried to include every intricate detail of the plotline without presenting the nature of the conflicts, our five-minute version aimed at presenting only the most vital elements of the plot while also foregrounding some of those motifs of the play that would be deconstructed and reconstituted in the nonverbal scenes that would follow in the performance.

²⁰⁰ It was Tony Zafra, an internationally acclaimed marionette artist, who had taken time to analyze the performance and emphasize the need for further guidelines for the audience.

²⁰¹ The idea originates from Gergely J. Tamási.

the following: “The play’s the thing wherein / I’ll catch the conscience of the king” (2.2.633-34). These two sentences are enough to refer to the play within the play (already acted out in the prologue) and to remind the audience what is at stake here: whether the power of a theater performance is truly enough to evoke a sense of guilt in Claudius. None of the lines used in the performance aim at explaining the events on stage, nor do they provide any evident solution to the conflicts presented, but they serve instead as a guideline for the audience to recognize the problem to be addressed and to be able to connect the scene to the corresponding passage in the text. In all subsequent performances these projected lines have been used, and are always translated to the language of the host country.

The fact that the performance works remarkably well with this addition does not in any way mean that the method of translating text to images and action has failed. It may be that to someone perfectly familiar with the play no indication is needed as to what the given scene refers to, but I believe such a marginal strand of the theater as a solo, non-verbal marionette performance should aim at the widest audience possible. The use of these projected lines is similar to the final stage of the exercise of translating text to images and action, described earlier, where the puppeteer is required to perform a monologue with speaking only the first and last lines of the speech, thus providing a point of orientation for the spectator. In *Re:Hamlet*, although the words used are not necessarily the first or final words of a given speech, the projected lines also provide a verbal frame to the nonverbal scene.

Another example of how puppetry can translate textual metaphors to visual signs can be observed in a scene based on these words, spoken by the Ghost in reference to Claudius: “know, thou noble youth, /The serpent that did sting thy father's life/ Now wears his crown” (1.5.45-47).²⁰² The word ‘serpent’ carries the strong connotations of evil and sin, which are obvious elements in Claudius’s personality, but ‘serpent’ is also connected to sexuality and lust (the snake itself being a phallic symbol); to fear (ophidiophobia being one of the most primal fears of mankind); to our general revulsion against slippery, slimy, wriggling animals;

²⁰² It is important to note that although the composition of the scene is based on these lines, it is not this part of the text that is projected before the scene. The goal of the projections is to provide information about what conflict is being addressed, rather than to explain the action. If the lines “The serpent that did sting thy father's life/ Now wears his crown” were projected, the following scene would become no more than an illustration of the text. The intention of this adaptation is to allow the audience to make their own associations, while the purpose of the projected lines is to provide a key to the connection between text and performance rather than providing the connection itself. Thus, the words preceding the scene with Claudius appearing in the form of a serpent and seducing the Queen are the following: “Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother’s death / the memory be green...”(1.2.1-2).

as well as to the identification of the venom of the snake with the poison of lies.²⁰³ This association becomes especially important since lies enter through the ears just as the lies of the Biblical serpent enter Eve's ears, and just as the poison poured by Claudius enters the old king's body through his ear. The character of Claudius, if played well, will evoke all these associations in the spectator of the live theater, but few will directly connect the image of the king lying about his sorrow over the old king's death (1.2.1-7), the image of the "incestuous" and "adulterate beast" (1.5.49) seducing Gertrude, and the image of the stabbed king still trying to wriggle his way out of an obviously hopeless situation when he says "O, yet defend me, friends; I am but hurt" (5.2.355) with the image of the serpent. *Re:Hamlet* works with trying to understand the core of these verbal metaphors, deciphering the components of each character's personality and inner conflicts, and transforming them into material that can be presented on the puppet stage. When Claudius literally appears as a snake and seduces the mourning Gertrude into placing the crown onto his head with her very own hands, we are constructing a scene to which there is no direct textual reference, but to which the whole text serves as a testament. As Szigeti says,

We take a motif or metaphor and deconstruct it to its last bits, then reconstruct it in visual signs, showing more layers of meaning than one would expect. This is both different and more than what the live theater can do.²⁰⁴

Another scene that reconstructs the text as visual signs is based on what Hamlet tells his mother in the "closet scene":

Look here, upon this picture, and on this,
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
See, what a grace was seated on this brow;
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;
A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;
A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man:
This was your husband. Look you now, what follows:
Here is your husband; like a mildew'd ear,
*Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?*²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Matthew A. Fike in *A Jungian Study of Shakespeare* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) cites two additional connotations of the snake: "the snake represents both instinct and wisdom (the qualities of the collective unconscious)" and it "also symbolizes danger and the resulting fear of death, and in youth it denotes fear of life" 21. As has been explained before in connection with dramatic context, such associations are highly culture specific, always relying on the iconographic repertory and tools of decoding of the audience.

²⁰⁴ Szigeti 2011

²⁰⁵ Only the italicized lines are used in the performance.

Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes? (3.4.63-77)

After this Hamlet goes on to further pronounce his mother's guilt and shame in loving a murderer, and questions her virtue, even her judgment, to which Gertrude answers:

O Hamlet, speak no more:
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct. (3.4.99-102)

There are two conflicts in this scene: one between Hamlet and Gertrude, the other within Gertrude herself. As *Re:Hamlet* was, from the very first moment, designed as a one-man show (and the marionette technique used in the performance generally allows for the manipulation of a single puppet at a time), one of the basic methods of producing the screenplay of the adaptation was finding the inner conflicts of the characters. The most rewarding moments for puppetry are those points in the drama where a character is faced with a dilemma and has to make a decision. The more difficult the decision, the more interesting the scene will be, as it is in the case of Gertrude, who is in a truly impossible predicament. After marrying Claudius, probably out of love, should she suddenly throw away her happiness in the face of an unproven accusation of murder and be faithful to the memory of a dead man, someone she might never have truly loved, or defy her son's pleas, warnings and allegations and try to be happy with a man who might or might not be a murderer, but because of whom she will surely lose her son? This is the kind of dilemma that can physically destroy a person, and it is this physicality of the situation that the puppet theater can work with.

In *Re:Hamlet*, Gertrude enters the scene and kneels for prayer in front of a black curtain. She stands up and reveals a gigantic portrait of her late husband behind the curtain. She begins dusting the picture frame and as she works, her hand snags on another black cloth on the other side, accidentally revealing another portrait, this one of Claudius. At first she only glances across at the second picture, trying to devote her full attention to the dead king's portrait, but after a while she cannot resist going over to the other side, and she starts wiping the other picture. Now she not only cleans the frame, but rather tenderly, even lovingly strokes the picture itself. Suddenly the portrait of Old Hamlet tilts dangerously, threatening to fall off the wall. Gertrude hurries over to the picture and pushes it back in its place. The cycle repeats: she goes over to Claudius's portrait; the first picture tilts; she pushes it back. But now, as she leans on the old king's picture after wrestling it back into position, the portrait of Claudius tilts. As she starts toward it the first picture tilts again, and she is left in the middle

with both gigantic paintings hanging in mid air, threatening to crush her. Unable to reach both pictures at the same time she takes a few tentative steps toward the picture of Old Hamlet, then stops, turns, and without looking back she goes to the painting of Claudius and secures it in its place on the wall. As she stands there panting, practically embracing Claudius's likeness the late king's portrait finally crashes to the ground – revealing behind it another painting of Claudius, identical to the first. Now the ever-intensifying music (*In the Hall of the Mountain King* from Grieg's *Peer Gynt*) reaches its summit with a crash, and the scene ends with Gertrude collapsing beside the fallen 'corpus' of Old Hamlet while the two images of Claudius tower over her from both sides.

Just as with all instances of intersemiotic translation, it is obviously not the entire dialogue but rather the central conflict expressed in the scene that is translated to the sign system of the puppet theater. The overpowering presence of the two paintings evokes the force with which Hamlet had demanded that his mother look at the pictures and had not allowed her to look away. The painting of the old king shows him the way Hamlet sees him: majestic in his armor and with his crown on his head. But the eyes reveal a kind of blankness, an expression that is nothing like Hamlet's recollection of his father with "An eye like Mars, to threaten and command" (3.4.67). This is the face of a man who does not fully comprehend the world around him, and is, thus, vulnerable to treachery and deceit. The portrait of Claudius is no less imposing in its appearance, and is far from the image of "A king of shreds and patches" (3.4.117), as Hamlet sees him, but is rather a painting of an assertive man with a regal stature as beheld by Gertrude. But again, it is the eyes that reveal something more and, in this case something only Hamlet can see: there is something undoubtedly cunning and calculating in those eyes.

The three scenes described above are by no means a representation of the *only* way the puppet theater can work with a Shakespearean text, nor are they examples of *ideal* solutions. They are merely examples of *possible ways* of bringing together the worlds of Shakespeare and the puppet stage. The work of any creator or director of the theater, and not only the puppet theater, begins by taking a first step towards that "other direction"²⁰⁶ Jan Kott talks about, which in this case is the translation of verbal poetry into visual elements. All of the visual details work toward the interpretation of the text: images present in the given dialogue, as well as ideas and metaphors understood from other parts of the drama are transformed into visual signs. Although the number of possible directions is endless, without this first step one

²⁰⁶ Marowitz 110.

may never be able to transform Shakespeare's plays from the two dimensions of the page to the three dimensions of the stage. As Marowitz puts it:

The director who is committed to putting the play on the stage exactly as it is written is the equivalent of the cook who intends to make the omelet without cracking the eggs.²⁰⁷

4.3. Conclusion

The title of this chapter is *Adaptation in action*, as it was aimed at examining how a theoretical concept of staging Shakespeare in the puppet theater may be put into practice. In discussing the specific requirements of a puppet theater adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, it was argued in Chapter 1 that the director will have to know *why* he finds the given adaptation justifiable and relevant, decide *what* the direction of the adaptation will be, and understand *how* puppetry can lend new relevance and actuality to the text and how the play may be suited for the puppet stage. Three questions (*why*, *what* and *how*) were formulated based on these requirements, and the analysis of the process of adaptation was based on providing answers to these questions.

The current chapter set out to answer the second and third questions. In answering the second question (*what*) I addressed the challenge of the text, the issue of technique and the practices of design and movement in *Re:Hamlet*. The challenges of dealing with the text were discussed based on the observation that puppet theater can translate verbal metaphors to visual metaphors, and is better suited to present a play with the use of images and movement than with the use of the recited text. Since this method of translating the text to visual elements, if combined with spoken lines, would neither do justice to the Shakespearean text, nor would it satisfy the specific needs of the puppet theater, the direction the creators of *Re:Hamlet* had taken was the staging of a nonverbal *Hamlet*. This decision, supported by the understanding that it is possible to produce an instance of the play based on its dramatic content rather than its text, had allowed *Re:Hamlet* to take full advantage of the unique abilities of puppetry.

In discussing the issue of technique, it was explained that while decidedly there are disadvantages to using string marionettes in a performance, these disadvantages are outweighed by the possibilities inherent in working with this type of puppet. Because of the unique way the marionette creates the illusion of the object with life and as such, it is, among all types of puppets, the most recognizable metaphor for the human being, it is an appropriate

²⁰⁷ Marowitz 3.

instrument for translating verbal poetry to the nonverbal medium of the puppet theater and particularly suitable for expressing some of the most fundamental themes of Shakespearean plays, such as power struggles, manipulation or being the victim of unavoidable circumstances.

In answering the third question (how), the specific methods of staging *Re:Hamlet* were analyzed. It was firstly explained how the creators of the adaptation had produced their own screenplay based on their interpretation the text by translating the play to the idiom of puppetry. As it was shown through the analysis of the performance, in *Re:Hamlet* the primary method of intersemiotic translation was the use of the two essential signs of the puppet: design and movement. These signs, as was explained, are inherent to the puppet while the sign of speech is not, and it is because of this quality of the puppet that *Re:Hamlet* was able to effectively convey the dramatic content of the play without the use of speech.

Three scenes from *Re:Hamlet* were shown as examples of the way the puppet theater can stage covert motifs of the drama, translate verbal metaphors and allegories to visual signs and emphasize the inner conflicts of the characters with the use of images and action. While it was argued that translating the play to the nonverbal sign system of puppetry is a practicable approach to staging Shakespeare, it was also pointed out that there may be problems with the method when none of the text is used. Although any work of art is inevitably open for the unconstrained interpretation of the recipient, it was emphasized that in the case of a theater performance attempting to translate verbal poetry to the sign system of a nonverbal medium, the director should provide some additional indication as to what his own interpretation is. In order to assist understanding, two elements served as such indicators in *Re:Hamlet*: the use of a nonverbal prologue introducing the characters, reiterating the original story of the play and foreshadowing the major themes to be addressed; and the inclusion of certain lines from the text, projected onto a screen next to the stage, reinforcing the interpretation of the creators. It was asserted that the need for additional support for the better understanding of the performance did not mean that the method of translating the play to the nonverbal sign system of the puppet theater had failed. As it was explained, the projected lines function as textual frames to the nonverbal scenes.

The next chapter will propose a possible approach to devising a puppet theater performance of Shakespearean plays based on the finding of the previous chapters as well as on the experiences of creating and performing *Re:Hamlet*.

Chapter 5. Adaptation in Progress

In the previous chapter I discussed a possible approach to staging Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. As I pointed out, *Re:Hamlet* was a workable but by no means model interpretation of the play. I discussed in detail three scenes that have worked very well; the performance, however, could not altogether achieve what it had set out to do, that is, to 'produce a creative and recognizable interpretation of the work while rendering it suitable for the medium of the puppet theater' (cf. my own criteria for *adaptation* set in Chapter 1). The balance between creativity and suitability for the puppet theater on the one hand, and recognizability of the traditions that compel us to scrutinize the "original" and its origins on the other, was not always maintained. Although *Re:Hamlet* did manage to work with many of the associations connected to the drama, and by translating verbal metaphors and allegories to visual signs it did in fact make it possible to present scenes from the play with the use of images and action, it did not achieve a level of coherence one would expect from a production labeled as an *adaptation of Hamlet*.

The shortcomings of the performance can be traced back to a number of reasons, both external (such as the pressure of producing a finished work in time for the premier) and internal (such as my own inability to view my work from a broader perspective, without getting lost in the details and technicalities). The most important factor in our failure to maintain a consistent quality throughout the production, however, was the fact that at the time neither Szigeti nor I accepted that although many aspects of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* render it a wonderful source material for the puppet stage, not all parts of the play would lend themselves equally readily to the tools of puppetry (or conversely, our method of adaptation was not equally suitable for all aspects of the drama). The positive examples of the radically rearranged German or Bulgarian *Hamlet* or the Czech *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations, as well as the difficulties connected to *Re:Hamlet* indicate that the puppet theater requires a more flexible approach to working with dramatic material: a director or artist working on an adaptation will need to balance his desire to follow the original dramaturgy of the play and his aspiration to adhere to the requirements of the adapting medium. When working on the performance text of the production Szigeti and I tried to avoid those elements that seemed to pose obvious difficulties for a one-man puppet show (scenes that are strongly based on dialogue, for example, or ones which require the presence of multiple characters on stage) but at the same time we aimed at presenting a plot that essentially followed the Shakespearean dramaturgy. This decision left us with a number of segments, which, although possible to

force into the framework of the particular medium, turned out to be rather less rewarding than scenes such as the ones discussed in the previous chapter. Such a scene was based on the idea of representing the duel of Hamlet and Laertes as a game of chess,²⁰⁸ played by Claudius. All of the main characters of the drama were featured on the board, even Claudius himself, and the entire plot of the play was symbolically played out with the puppet Claudius controlling all pieces except the figure representing Hamlet, the only chess piece over which he has no control. The scene could have worked very well, and it did, in fact, represent a symbolic interpretation of the dramatic text with the strong metatheatrical element of doubling the figure of Claudius (and thereby emphasizing the dualities in his character, such as his position of uncle and father, brother-in-law and husband, murderer and victim-to-be of a revenge plot), however, the idea exhausted itself after the first few moves, by which point the audience understood perfectly what we intended to express. The remaining minutes became monotonous for the spectators as well as for the puppeteer, and Szigeti and I quickly understood that this was one of those elements of the performance that would need serious revision.

The initial joy of finding that a particular method of interpretation (many new frameworks, systems and ideologies tend to show great promise at first) reveals hidden qualities in a work of art is inevitably followed by the recognition that no system answers all possible questions. Although the scheme of translating metaphors and images in the text to visual signs in the performance may work very well in several cases, there are elements of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that refuse to be coerced into the framework of intersemiotic translation to the nonverbal sign system of puppetry. The force applied when one denies these difficulties leaves palpable dents in a performance: moments where there is obvious discord between the play and the performing medium will stand out and occasionally invalidate even those parts where content and form are in accord.

The experience of, on the one hand, often successfully applying the method of translating verbal information to visual signs and, on the other hand, being faced with scenes where the approach obviously fails, has led Szigeti and myself to consider the possibility of designing a new project. This project, instead of attempting to stage a complete play, would aim at designing scenes based on those elements of Shakespeare's world of images where the tools of puppetry seem to offer original yet feasible solutions. The entire project of *Re:Hamlet* was born from a single element of this nature: the understanding that the serpent metaphor

²⁰⁸ Chess was an important symbol in the early modern period (cf. Middleton: *A Game at Chess*)

Shakespeare employs when describing Claudius can serve as the basis for a segment exploring the question whether Gertrude realizes that she is ‘cherishing a snake in her bosom’. This was the first scene I had imagined years before effectively starting work on a complete staging of *Hamlet*, and it is a piece I still perform on most of my tours as an independent excerpt from *Re:Hamlet*. The scene works remarkably well even without the context of an entire performance of the play. It is one of the most representative moments of *Hamlet* being adapted to the puppet stage, as it captures one of the key conflicts of the play by translating verbal metaphors to physical imagery. This is not a unique opportunity for the puppet theater, however, as many other Shakespeare plays also contain elements that readily lend themselves to puppetry. It was this realization that has led Szigeti and myself to pursue the aforementioned new project, one that aims at working with similar elements from a number of different plays, thereby creating a collection of ‘Shakespeare etudes’. Such a performance will be able to concentrate on those excerpts from the plays that are most manageable by and thus, most rewarding for the puppet stage: scenes in which a puppet staging can add new layers of meaning to the “Shakespearean experience”.²⁰⁹

5.1. Tragic and comic elements on the puppet stage

Interestingly, when we set down to discuss scenes from different Shakespeare plays, Szigeti and I, without ever making a conscious decision to do so, almost exclusively talked about tragedies. *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard III* seemed to provide ample material for the puppet stage while from among the comedies only *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest* inspired solutions for the puppet stage. It seems that our preferences mirrored the thinking of puppeteers worldwide, as there are and have always been significantly fewer puppet adaptations of Shakespearean comedies than of tragedies. In order to assess the current repertory of Shakespeare puppet adaptations one can take his own experience of performances, conduct an online search and consult festival directors and puppeteers, all of which I have done. My findings have shown that the plays most frequently performed in the puppet theater in the past fifteen years have been *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. The comedies have almost exclusively been represented by *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*, while productions of other plays have been few and far in between. Some notable examples have been *Twelfth-Night* in the Puppet Theater of

²⁰⁹ Marowitz 31

Győr in 2001, performed with nothing but glasses, cups, bottles, pitchers and jars; *The Comedy of Errors* by California Shakespeare Theater in 2004, performed by live actors manipulating human sized puppets; or *As You Like It* by Marionettentheater Dagmar Horstmann of Basel in 2008, featuring live actors and puppeteers with string marionettes.

One conceivable reason for the dominance of tragedies on the puppet stage may be the fact that *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet* or *Macbeth* are simply better known plays than are most of the comedies and therefore it is easier to bring in the audience with these titles than it would be with the lesser known comedies. This popularity of the aforementioned plays, one would suppose, would naturally stem from them being featured on the live stage and on film more than comedies, thereby reaching a wider audience and generating even more popularity. This conclusion seems to be supported by the film database of the British Universities Film and Video Council²¹⁰ which shows that the 4 most frequently adapted Shakespearean plays of all time are *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*. Among the 10 most popular plays, however, there are also four comedies (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth-Night* and *The Taming of the Shrew*), and although 40 percent may not seem significant, even this is much higher than the ratio of comedies to tragedies on the puppet stage. The scene is even more varied if one takes a look at Hungarian theater performances of Shakespeare. According to the database of the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute,²¹¹ the most popular Shakespeare play of all time on the Hungarian stages has been *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with over 100 premiers since its first Hungarian performance in 1864, followed by *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Tempest*, *Richard III*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. This means that half of the 10 most popular Shakespeare plays of all time on the Hungarian stages have been comedies, with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* taking a substantial lead over all other plays.

These findings are significant since if the number of puppet adaptations were determined merely by the reputation of the given play on the stage or on the screen, one would expect to find the same results when it comes to the puppet theater, with comedies representing about half of the repertory. This is not the case, however. Of the 21 world-renown puppet theater adaptations of the past fifteen years I have either seen live or have had access to through recordings, only 7 are comedies, and of those only 3 that were plays other than *The Tempest* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Even more striking is the data provided by

²¹⁰ <http://bufvc.ac.uk>

²¹¹ <http://szinhaziintezet.hu/>

Susan Young in her book about the history of Shakespeare adaptations in Italy²¹² (the only book available on the topic of puppet adaptations of Shakespeare!), where she lists 31 marionette productions of Shakespeare in Italy between 1800 and 1985, out of which 27 were tragedies and only 4 comedies. As a final twist to the tale, here again we find that of the 4 comedic adaptations listed by Young 3 were of *The Tempest* and the remaining one of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Seeing such a significant difference between the preference of the live stage or the cinema and that of the puppet theater, one has to suppose that there is something more at play than simply a general popularity of some plays and a lower reputation of others. There must be something inherent in the great tragedies, *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that draws puppet theaters to adapt these plays significantly more frequently than other works and, at the same time, there must also be something (or something lacking) in the rest of the oeuvre, and especially in comedies, that compels puppetry to, unlike the cinema or the live stage, all but disregard them.

Although our considerations in choosing tragedies to adapt rather than comedies were heavily influenced by the possibilities and limitations of the framework of a nonverbal, one-man string marionette show, many of the reasons for our preference point to some of the more central issues of puppet theater adaptations in general and are thus, worth looking into in detail. In the following then, I will examine those elements of Shakespearean drama that seem to work well on the puppet stage and show how the differences between the constituents in tragedies and comedies may affect the possibilities of a puppet theater adaptation and thereby account for the clear preference of the puppet stage for Shakespeare's tragic oeuvre. Seeing the striking difference between the Shakespeare repertory of the puppet stage on the one hand and the live stage and cinema on the other, looking for possible reasons seems a more than relevant, but curiously un-researched problem. Since no study is available on the topic of comic and tragic elements on the puppet stage, I am left with my own analyses of Shakespearean adaptations and my experiences of working with Shakespearean texts..

I would argue that one of the most profound difficulties the puppet theater is faced with when adapting Shakespeare is to be found in the language of the plays. Looking at the Shakespearean oeuvre from the point of view of the mainly visual art form of puppetry, it seems that while tragedy is often highly figurative, and its language metaphorical and allegorical (and thereby ideal ground for visual representation), comedy is often more literal,

²¹² Susan Young. *Shakespeare manipulated: the use of dramatic works of Shakespeare in teatro di figura in Italy* (London: Associated University Presses, 1996)

and its language, if not less poetic, is less symbolic than that of tragedy.²¹³ This difference is also tangible in the nature of the hero each genre employs. The tragic character lives in his conflicts, his sense of tragedy is to be found in his innermost thoughts, plans and desires. Tragedy arises from the discord between the hero's personality, his intentions and the outside circumstances he is faced with. The comic character, in contrast, lives predominantly in his language, and consequently, his sense of comedy is to be found mainly in his spoken interactions with other characters, often in the form of puns, irony, caricature and witticisms.

As Lynne Magnusson writes in *Language and Comedy*, "Shakespeare's excellence as a comic dramatist [...] depends on his keen observation of how language works in actual social contexts".²¹⁴ Magnusson also observes that "self-reflective commentary about the language is very common in Shakespeare's comedies"²¹⁵; that "all the comedies revel in repetition-based verbal ambiguities and shifting significations"²¹⁶, devices that we generally call puns; and that Shakespeare also uses rhetorical elements of language-play to "explore sex differentiation".²¹⁷ Finally, she quotes Keir Elam's study of comic discourse, entitled *Universe of Discourse*, in which Elam says "It is the game-frame dialectic, exploiting language as activity and as object, that lends Shakespearean comedy much of its discursive momentum and depth".²¹⁸ Stephen Greenblatt in *Shakespearean Negotiations* also points out the importance of verbal interactions in comedies, especially in connection with love relationships, when he writes "Dallying with words is the principal Shakespearean representation of erotic heat [...] Hence his plots go out of their way to create not only obstacles in the lovers' path but occasions for friction between them".²¹⁹

Since, as stated above, the puppet theater is an art form primarily based on the signs of design and movement, and speech is only an auxiliary element of staging, there is an inherent conflict between the requirements of comedy and the possibilities of the representing medium. This is not to say, of course, that there can be no successful puppet adaptations of any Shakespearean comedy, as examples of celebrated performances listed in this dissertation show. It is a fact, however, that the less prominence speech carries in a play, the more likely it

²¹³ Cf. Dryden, quoted in Simon Shepherd's *Drama Theatre Performance* (18), who says "while comedy imitates 'common persons and ordinary speaking' tragedy is 'the representation of nature, but 'tis nature wrought up to a higher pitch'".

²¹⁴ In: *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*. Ed: Alexander Leggatt. Cambridge Companions to Literature, 2002. 59.

²¹⁵ Magnusson 157.

²¹⁶ Magnusson 158.

²¹⁷ Magnusson 172.

²¹⁸ Magnusson 176.

²¹⁹ Stephen Greenblatt. *Shakespearean Negotiations: the Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988. 90.

becomes that the method of translating verbal material into nonverbal signs, the method Szigeti and I aimed to employ in our work, may provide effective staging techniques for the drama. Consequently, a production with emphasis on visual signs may exemplify a knowledgeable use of the tools of puppetry, but it may also lose the part (and, arguably the greater part) of the comic effect that lives only in the spoken word.

Parallel to the problem of diminishing much of the comic effect with deemphasizing the importance of speech, another difficulty for the puppet theater is presented by the *form* of the text in Shakespearean comedies. The emphasis in the text of comedies is often on the dialogues, and these are generally less poetic, less metaphorical and more literal than are monologues or soliloquies. As Fijan and Starobin explain in *Directing Puppet Theatre*, “complex dialogue does not work well on the puppet stage [...] If puppets talk too much, one becomes aware of their artificiality”.²²⁰ Fijan and Starobin make an important point, albeit with the wrong reasoning. The reality is that puppets, as inanimate objects animated in performance, constantly reflect upon their artificial nature, and this is a strength of the genre rather than a weakness. Emphasizing this artificiality can become a powerful tool of puppetry. It is not the inanimate or ‘object’ nature of the puppet that causes discord if lengthy dialogues are used, but the reality that puppets do not actually have their own voice. The real, and more problematic sense of ‘artificiality’ in lengthy dialogues performed with puppets then, may arise from the phenomenon that while design is inherently a part of the puppet and movement, although initiated by the puppeteer, will appear to emanate from the figure itself, speech is always external to the puppet, ‘its’ voice audibly and visibly coming not from the object but from a human animator. It is not the puppet, therefore, that becomes artificial in performance, but the dialogue itself.

One may instinctively suppose that long and difficult monologues are no less problematic on the puppet stage than are dialogues, and this is true if one simply has a puppet speak the lines. If, however, one applies the method of translating the text to the nonverbal (or at least largely action and motion based) idiom of the puppet theater, presented in the previous chapter, these soliloquies offer immense opportunities for puppetry. One could virtually open any of the great tragedies and would find such opportunities in most soliloquies (as has been shown in connection with the adaptations of *Hamlet* discussed earlier, and will be demonstrated shortly, in the section concerning *Richard III*). A very simple example is when instead of saying something akin to ‘I have foreboding thoughts’ Macbeth tells his wife “O,

²²⁰ Fijan and Starobin 17.

full of scorpions is my mind” (3.2.41). While referring to the same concept the two are far from being the same and the use of a metaphor instead of a literal phrase makes all the difference for the puppet theater. A mind full of scorpions is not only a notion but also a picture, a strong image with which puppetry can work to create its own world built on artistic design and expressive movement.

Another basic difference between comedy and tragedy from the point of view of puppetry is to be found in their respective topographies of human interactions, which ultimately affect dramatic tension. Shakespearean comedy generally builds on the interaction between characters of close equal importance or follows parallel and eventually overlapping, but basically independent plotlines. These plotlines meet at the end of the play often not out of inevitability but in order for everyone to be present at the compulsory wedding scene. Each story has its own conflict and solution and thus, dramatic tension is shared between the different characters rather than being focused within a single, central conflict. Most Shakespearean plays can be viewed as being structured like a spider’s web where the fabric of the mesh is the interactions between the characters who often seem like flies caught in the sticky matter of uncontrollable circumstances, chance or manipulation. In the case of comedy, in this analogy, a spider (in the villainous form of a Don John, an Angelo or a Shylock) may be lurking in the corner and at times may seem to pose a serious threat to the flies, but not even the worst of these villains manages to seize control of all threads of the plot. In most comedies there is no spider at all and, thus, the various characters affect one another with their flustering without the actual danger of attracting a predator. *The Tempest*, with Prospero as an omnipotent force on the island is an exception in this respect, and this, in great part, is why this play is more easily accessible for the puppet theater than are many other comedies or romances

In tragedy, in contrast, a spider – be it a hero, a villain or an unresolved conflict – is always crouching in the very middle of the web impinging on (and often taking) the lives of others involved in the story. Everyone and everything is connected to that one central point, and everything moves in accordance with the tension and release initiated there. Macbeth creates his web of power with his ambition, as does Gloucester in *Richard III*. In *Hamlet* there are two spiders weaving the threads: the prince with his revenge plot and Claudius with his scheme to silence Hamlet, but their plots are so interconnected as to effectively produce a single, extremely powerful central force field influencing the lives of everyone else in the play. King Lear, with his poor judgment is more the sufferer than the protagonist of his own story, but all plotlines are undoubtedly connected to, and affected by, his person. In *Othello*

the spider, with his genius for manipulation is Iago while the title character is merely a fly – albeit the biggest fly – caught in Iago’s web, while in *Romeo and Juliet* the feud between the families is the central point and all the characters, including the protagonists, are caught up in the tacky tissue of the conflict of love and hate.

A central conflict affecting everyone or the presence of a hero or villain who controls or attempts to control every aspect of the story is beneficial to the puppet stage because the dramatic tension implied by such forces can be translated to visual signs. Manipulating others or being manipulated (central motifs in *Othello*, *The Tempest* or *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*), gaining or losing status through power struggles and mistakes (*Richard III*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*), or fighting against but eventually falling victim to unavoidable circumstances (*Romeo and Juliet*, and to some extent, *Hamlet*) are all elements of dramaturgy that present opportunities for a puppet theater staging. I have already described a number of possibilities for the use of these elements in the previous chapters and more examples will be provided in the following discussion of two puppet scenes.

Another factor why tragedy supplies a more fertile environment for representation with the tools of puppetry than does comedy is that while in comedy conflicts seem to stem from characters’ reactions to coincidental external factors, such as misunderstandings, chance meetings or identity shifts, conflicts in tragedy typically arise from the protagonist’s personality traits and flaws, such as vengefulness, ambition and lust, clashing with unavoidable circumstances. The decisions tragic characters make when they are faced with almost impossible odds are affected by their very own tragic flaws as much as by the inescapable external forces. Mark William Roche in *Tragedy and Comedy*²²¹ distinguishes between five major types of tragedy, that of self-sacrifice, stubbornness, opposition, awareness and suffering and notes that all of these are based on the conflict of the will, consciousness or desire of the individual with the outside world. Tragedy, then, depends on the ability and ambition of the individual to affect the world around him and to cope with the demons of his own mind.

Puppetry is particularly interested in impossibly difficult choices, since the conflict of choosing between decency and immorality, reality and desire, truth and love, or honor and life often lend opportunities for a visual interpretation of the internal struggles accompanying these decisions. Where a conflict can be represented by two opposing forces or two conflicting choices, as was described in the ‘picture scene’ of *Re:Hamlet*, where Gertrude is

²²¹ Mark William Roche. *Tragedy and Comedy: A Systematic Study and a Critique of Hegel*. New York: State university of New York Press, 1998. 130-333.

physically torn between the images of her former and present husband, the puppet theater is able to express the psychological and physical difficulties or even impossibilities of such conflicts in terms of design and movement. Choices of vital importance carry the possibility of a tragic end and, consequently, when comedy contains actual and real decisions with true weight behind them, the play swiftly turns into tragedy. This is what happens in the case of *Romeo and Juliet* and it is by no coincidence that most puppet adaptations of the play place little emphasis on the comic scenes at the beginning of the play, which, although ingeniously written and structured, allow insufficient room for visual representation.

The considerations discussed above all indicate that the tools of puppetry seem to be more adequately suited for presenting tragedy than they are for staging comedy and as has been established before, tragedies do, in fact, take an overwhelming majority in numbers when it comes to puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare. The comedies that often do inspire creators of puppetry are those that portray, as their central themes, elements of status struggles, power play and manipulation. In view of this, in the following I will present two scenes, both of which (although one based on tragedy while the other on comedy) build upon very similar central motifs. Both scenes have been constructed with the methodology described in the previous chapter and are presented by a single performer in the framework of a nonverbal marionette show.

5.2. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

If one asks the fundamental question why anyone should produce *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the puppet theater, it is István Géher who provides the clearest answer in *Shakespeare-olvasókönyv*, where he writes that Shakespeare “manages to formulate a coherent drama from the cultural mayhem of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by applying to it the brutal dramaturgy of the puppet theater”.²²² In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare expresses some of the most important notions that preoccupy the world of puppetry and uses an array of tools very familiar to those of the puppet theater. Just as *The Tempest*, this particular play also holds a treasure for the puppet stage: manipulation. However, while in *The Tempest* there is only one master puppeteer, here there are three: Géher emphasizes the puppet master nature of *Theseus* and *Oberon*²²³, while Jan Kott in *Shakespeare our*

²²² Géher István. *Shakespeare-olvasókönyv*. Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1991.127 (my translation).

²²³ Géher 127.

Contemporary talks about *Puck* as someone who “pulls all the characters on strings”.²²⁴ All three characters control others; however, they are not the only ones. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* almost everyone is trying to manipulate someone else: Theseus forces Hippolyta into marriage (“Hippolyta, I woo’d thee with my sword, / And won thy love, doing thee injuries” 1.1.17-18); Egeus tries to force Hermia to marry a man she does not love (“And she is mine, and all my right of her / I do estate unto Demetrius” 1.1.99-100); Bottom constantly manipulates and bullies the other mechanicals as he is trying to take hold of some promising roles, like that of Flute (“An I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too” 1.2.49) and Snug (“Let me play the lion too” 1.2.68), and at times even manages to take the role of stage manager away from Quince (“We will meet; and there we may rehearse most / obscenely and courageously. Take pains; be perfect” 1.2.103-4); Oberon and Titania blackmail each other with the ‘stolen boy’ (“jealous Oberon would have the child / [...] / But she perforce withholds the loved boy” 2.1.24-26); Oberon manipulates Titania into falling in love with an ass (“And with the juice of this I’ll streak her eyes, / And make her full of hateful fantasies” 2.1.265-66), and he orders Puck to meddle with the feelings of the four young lovers (“A sweet Athenian lady is in love / With a disdainful youth: anoint his eyes” 2.1.268-69). But these young people are guilty of manipulation, too: Demetrius tries to force Hermia and Lysander into giving up their love (“Relent, sweet Hermia: and, Lysander, yield / Thy crazed title to my certain right” 1.1.93-94), and Helena attempts to put pressure on Demetrius by constantly following him (“I’ll follow thee and make a heaven of hell, / To die upon the hand I love so well” 2.1.250-51).

Many characters in this comedy behave in a manipulative way, trying to influence the way others think, feel or act. This, however, would not be possible without a number of characters who are easily influenced, i.e. who behave in a puppet-like manner. Thus, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* becomes a hierarchical system of puppets and puppet masters. Staging this hierarchical system is always a challenge for the theater. People, fairies and creatures from entirely different worlds come into interaction. They are not only set apart by where they come from but also by their physical forms and by the lack or possession of superhuman powers. Portraying these differences with the use of fluffy fairy costumes and flying actors hanging on wires from the rigging-loft undoubtedly has its lure. As Charles Haines informs us in *Shakespeare and His Plays*:

Directors in the twentieth century have adopted such techniques as covering half of the actors in gold paint, or of populating the stage with live rabbits, in

²²⁴ Kott 216.

attempts to provide a background of substance, a “local habitation” for Shakespeare’s “airy nothing”.²²⁵

The puppet theater is in a very different position. As a primarily visual art form that generally works by translating words to pictures and action, it is often in peril when attempting to tackle Shakespeare’s verbal poetry. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is, at once one of the most problematic (due to the strong verbal comedy of the play) but also one of the most rewarding (owing to its prominent themes of power, manipulation, loss of character and confusion) pieces of the Shakespearean oeuvre for the puppet theater.²²⁶ It may not come as a surprise then, that *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* already has established practices and conventions of adaptation on the puppet stage. Such a ‘conventional’ performance is on a world tour this year, having recently been created by the Bristol Old Vic Theatre in Collaboration with South Africa’s Handspring Puppet Company, for instance. This adaptation features puppets and live actors playing side by side, puppets portraying the fairies, actors with their puppet counterparts representing the young lovers, and actors playing the mechanicals. The different levels of the world of the Athenian forest are portrayed by the use of various puppet techniques, such as giant puppets, stop-motion animation figures and object puppets. A similar production, employing an assortment of techniques was staged in 2006 at the Philadelphia-based Mum Puppet Theater, where at the beginning of the performance, the actors playing the four lovers appeared in half-masks in the style of Italian commedia dell’arte. Once they entered the enchanted environment of the woods where fairies dwell, Japanese Bunraku-style puppets portrayed them. Finally, although the mechanicals were played by live actors, simple hand puppets were used in the style of a traditional Punch and Judy show to enact *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the play-within-the-play. In the same year the Budapest Puppet Theater premiered its own adaptation of the play with puppets for the lovers, live actors for the mechanicals and statues coming to life (animated by puppeteers) to become the fairy king and queen. In 2009 The Kolibri Theater, in association with MÜPA Palace of

²²⁵ Charles Haines. *Shakespeare and His Plays*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1968. (54). A similar ambition to recreate the magical surroundings and the visible differences in status is reflected in the way some productions have treated the figure of Oberon. As Anne Button notes in *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* “In the 20th century [...] the attempt to make [Oberon] other-worldly has moved towards giving him either fantastic costumes or very little costume at all. With the advent of electricity he was given lights in his headdress by Frank Benson and Beerbohm Tree (both 1900)” 323.

²²⁶ An interesting aspect of why a nonverbal, or not primarily speech-based, medium would have special interest in staging Shakespeare’s “dream, past the wit of man” (4.1.215) is provided by Derrida who in *Writing and Difference* says “Present in dreams, speech can only behave as an element among others, sometimes like a “thing” which the primary process manipulates according to its own economy” and then quotes Artaud saying “In this process thoughts are transformed into images, mainly of a visual sort; that is to say, word presentations are taken back to the thing-presentations which correspond to them” 304. This approach is very close to the idea of intersemiotic translation presented in the previous chapter.

Arts, produced an adaptation where actors, puppets, and musicians performing Mendelssohn's piece, were on the stage together. This production also portrayed the different worlds and the intricate system of manipulation across these worlds by repeatedly having actors, puppets and musicians cross one another's domain.

I have labeled these performances 'conventional' because all of them revolve around the idea of the transition between different worlds with different physical realities, and all of them present solutions by mixing various techniques of puppetry with live acting. The palace of Theseus, the Athenian forest where the mechanicals rehearse, and the enchanted parts of the woods where fairies dwell are all different realities. Since the puppet theater is already a unique reality itself, where setting up and breaking down boundaries between worlds is a convention, these transitions, and thereby these performances are, in fact, conventional in that they all employ solutions naturally arising from the principles and practices of puppetry. In 2002, as a student of puppetry at the Budapest Puppet Theater, I participated and played the part of Puck in a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was no less conventional than any of the above-mentioned adaptations. This version, like many others, built its dramaturgy upon the possibilities inherent in mixing the worlds of humans and puppets, as well as on employing different techniques to represent the numerous levels of the drama. Since this adaptation followed a very clear structure²²⁷ based on a hierarchy of the characters involved, it can serve as a model for showing the composition of a 'conventional' puppet theater interpretation of the play. Understanding the ideas behind such an interpretation will be important in order to show how a scene Szigeti and I have been working on recently breaks away from, but also builds upon, the conventions of staging *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the puppet theater.

In the 2002 adaptation, created as an exam performance by the third year students of puppetry, Oberon and Titania were played by actors wearing strongly stylized masks.²²⁸ The

²²⁷ The performance, while far from presenting an ideal interpretation, demonstrates a structure I am able to explain more authentically than that of any other adaptation, having been one of the creators of the show. This aspect is important if the aim is to discuss not only the *product* but also the *process* of adaptation.

²²⁸ Masks may be considered as belonging to a family of inanimate objects given life in performance. From the moment an actor puts on a mask and thereby animates it, the inanimate object comes alive and starts to represent something that arises not only from the nature of its material or form but also from the way it is used. As John Bell notes, "A mask is an object totally external to the performer, a sculptural expression imposed from without. To be effective onstage, it must appear to be articulated from within by the actor's own impulses" 23. The mask is an extraordinary theatrical tool: it has all the features of a puppet but at the same time it also functions as a costume. A costume is, in a sense, animated by the person wearing it, but it also redefines the personality of the actor who puts it on. A puppet will not necessarily have an effect on the manipulator, but a mask, like a costume, will modify the character of the person wearing it. Thus, as Bell explains, there is "a liminal zone where the actor in an oversized mask and the puppeteer in an all-encompassing bodysuit overlap" 23. Many performances

masks, as intermediary tools between the human actor and the puppet, elevate the actors from the world of human beings and enforce the message that members of the fairy world are in possession of all the superior qualities of humans and puppets alike. Royalty and gods, of course, also have their weak moments, such as Titania's 'minor incident' with Bottom when she descends to the level of a complete lack of self-control, and because in the hierarchy of puppets and humans the mask represents a divine quality, Titania inevitably loses hers when she falls in love with the 'bottom' of all creation, an ass.

Puck, who is also a member of the fairy world, did not wear a mask in the performance. The fact that smiles, winks and making faces are integral elements of Puck's mischievous nature was only part of the reason to leave his face unconcealed. More important was the idea that Puck represents the connection between the different realities of the drama. Were it not for Puck's mischievous meddling with the representatives of the two worlds, the fairies would never descend to the level of mere mortals, and were it not for Oberon's revenge on Titania, no human would ever come into contact with the fairy world. In the framework of the play, it is Puck who travels between the worlds like a Celtic Hermes of the Athenian woods. He is related to Oberon and Titania in that he is a manipulator of people. He is Robin Goodfellow, the "shrewd and knavish sprite", the "merry wanderer of the night", who "frights the maidens of the villagery", and even "jests Oberon" (2.1.34-46); he is the sprite who scares the daylights out of the fumbling mechanicals, teases fairies and controls the lives of the helpless lovers. He is not in control of his own life, however. He is manipulated by his master, Oberon and, thus, cannot be on the same level as the fairy king and queen. In the performance his face was painted, which aimed to express Puck's connection to the fairy world, but his facial expressions were visible. A mask hides all emotions, and thereby protects the wearer. This protection, however, is only the privilege of the sublime and the divine, and Puck is not one of them.

In a world where the inanimate is intertwined with the animate, and where being a puppet symbolizes both vulnerability and power, Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed – the minor members of the fairy kingdom – were portrayed by puppets, because they are on a level of consciousness unknown to beings of flesh and blood but they do not possess the ability to manipulate others. In the same world the young lovers were also puppets, but for a very different reason. While the minor fairies could not be represented by a flesh and blood presence because they are too ethereal and free, the young lovers could not be

employing the mixed techniques of live actors with masks and puppets achieve a strong theatrical effect because they manage to stay within the visually stimulating liminal zone Bell talks about.

anything else but puppets, because they are almost never free. After three conscious decisions (Hermia and Lysander's running away, Demetrius following them and Helena following him in turn), everything that happens to the four lovers is the result of them being influenced, in a semi-conscious state, by some form of higher force. This force can be that of a love potion or genuine love; the result is the same: these young people are not in control.

In the system of divine beings, ethereal spirits, mischievous sprites and blundering humans, the four lovers stand on the lowest level of consciousness. They are in a puppet-like state of being controlled, which is, in fact, referred to in the text. As the two girls argue one of them hurls the word 'puppet' at the other as an insult:

Hel. Fie, fie! you counterfeit, you puppet you!

Her. Puppet! why, so: ay, that way goes the game (3.2.303-4).

The word 'puppet', besides being one of Shakespeare's common insults like 'knave', 'toad' or 'lout', expresses a quality of weakness, vulnerability, smallness and dependency. Egeus himself 'objectifies' his daughter when he talks about her as his possession ("As she is mine, I may dispose of her" (1.1.43)), and later Theseus warns Hermia:

To you your father should be as a god;
One that composed your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax
By him imprinted and within his power
To leave the figure or disfigure it (1.1.48-52).

This suggest that Hermia is nothing but an object in the hands of her father, and it is not only Egeus, but also Theseus and later Oberon and Puck who control and manipulate Hermia like an inanimate item. Helena, Lysander and Demetrius are also victims of constant manipulation once they enter the Athenian woods.

In our adaptation of the play we turned to the type of puppet most commonly used as a metaphor of manipulation to represent the four lovers: the string marionette. As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, marionettes are the most subservient among puppets: that marionettes act upon the authority of a superior power is evident from the position of the manipulator. But while being completely exposed to the will of the operator, marionettes are also the most disobedient of puppets. A glove, rod or shadow puppet will obey the manipulator's every command; it will react to the slightest movement of the controller's hand. A marionette, conversely, will always have some uncontrolled movement, a little life of its own because whenever the puppeteer initiates a movement, some of the information will be lost or changed while it descends through the cluster of strings. There is always something slightly erratic in the way marionettes function, just as there is something not entirely

predictable in the way the young lovers act in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Theseus, Egeus, Oberon and Puck all control the four youths in turns, but none of them can predict that Hermia and Lysander will fall in love and run away, that Demetrius will follow them and that Helena will follow Demetrius. Nevertheless, falling in love, contradicting the elders and running away are just illusions of free will: enough only to cause a little excitement. The adventures of the young lovers are mere wobbles in the strings of control.

Up to this point, it seems, the tools of puppetry were perfectly capable of presenting the enchanted world of Shakespeare's "dream, past the wit of man" (4.1.215). In our 2002 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* we managed, like many other puppet theater adaptations, to translate the intricate system of earthly and celestial beings to the language of puppetry, but, like most other adaptations, we were unable to effectively fit into the framework of puppetry that part of the world which is in between the ethereal freedom of spirits and the complete servitude of the lovers. I am, of course, speaking of the problem of representing the blundering, down-to-earth, fallible mechanicals. The mechanicals are somewhere in between the states of complete naïveté and divine omnipotence; they are capable of acting on their own initiative but are very much influenced by the necessities and vanities of everyday life, such as making some money with their 'interlude' or feeling the glory of playing before the Duke. They need to have a goal to be sure of their own importance and can become wonderfully enthusiastic about something in which no one else can see much sense. With their likable flaws, their amusing enthusiasm and their petty but very familiar rivalries they are unquestionably human.

Even more prominently than their human qualities and fallibilities, it is the verbal comedy of their interactions that makes it nearly impossible (or at least impossible without a serious loss of comic effect) to represent the mechanicals with puppets. Even if the text is left intact, the fact that puppets, with limited or no facial expressions and no voice of their own play the parts of the mechanicals instead of live actors, inevitably diminishes the possibilities for the verbal comedy of the text to take effect. Puppet theater adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* almost invariably employ live actors to play the parts of the mechanicals, as did our own performance of 2002. Although the new production in the Bristol Old Vic Theatre chooses to have object puppets represent the mechanicals, a very strong physical presence of the actors manipulating the objects is required in order to achieve and maintain comic effect, and in critical moments the actors, in fact, abandon the object puppets and present the best of the verbal comedy without them.

I began this chapter by stating that, instead of attempting to stage a complete play, it is

also a viable project to base a production on a collage of scenes from different plays where a puppet staging can add new layers of meaning to the “Shakespearean experience”. As it has been explained, capturing the largely verbal and character-based comedy of the mechanicals is immensely difficult for the puppet theater, especially in the framework of a nonverbal, marionette show. The situational comedy of the interaction of the four lovers, Puck, Titania and Oberon, in contrast, is ideal territory for a medium that is, in itself a symbol for control and manipulation. This is why Szigeti and I designed a scene based on the antics of these characters to include in our Shakespeare collage. In the following then, I aim to show how this interpretation differs from but also builds upon the established conventions of staging *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the puppet theater.

The scene opens in a laboratory setting: the walls are lined with beakers, flasks, gas bubblers, test tubes and condensers, while in the center of the space there is a table with a large box placed on it. Next to the box there are two cages with a pair of white mice in each cage. In a corner of the room a figure is sitting in an armchair, completely hidden behind a newspaper he appears to be reading. The headline on the newspaper reads: Scientists claim ‘Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind’.²²⁹ From the tilting movement of the hands and the ever-lowering newspaper it is apparent that the concealed figure is slowly dosing off. As the newspaper finally falls, the audience sees a man with elven features and pointy ears, wearing a white lab coat and clogs. As he is about to fall asleep a large, elegant, finely articulated, disembodied hand appears from above, as if from the heavens, and produces a whiteboard with an equation written on it with colored markers. Instead of numbers, letters or symbols the equation consists of pictures and takes the following form:

$$\begin{aligned} &[\text{PICTURE OF FAIRY QUEEN}] + [\text{MYSTERIOUS SUBSTANCE IN A SYRINGE}] \\ &= [\text{PICTURE OF ASS’ HEAD INSIDE A LARGE RED HEART}] \end{aligned}$$

The scientist, who is of course none other than Puck, jolts upright from his slumber, but as soon as he realizes that he has been given yet another assignment, he seems less than enthusiastic to get to work. In answer to Oberon’s call Puck says in the play “I’ll put a girdle round about the earth / In forty minutes” (2.1.181-82), which can be taken as a boast from the sprite who feels that he is well overqualified for the task assigned for him. His words, however, may also be understood as a sarcastic comment on the seeming impossibility of finding “a little western flower, / Before milk-white, now purple with love’s wound” (2.1.172-73), the location of which is marked by the spot where Oberon remembers seeing Cupid’s

²²⁹ AMND 1.1.245.

arrow fall, while the fairy king “sat upon a promontory, / And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back” (2.1.154-55) and Cupid was flying somewhere “between the cold moon and the earth” (2.1.162). These are not what one might call geographically accurate coordinates and, in our interpretation, Puck’s somewhat reluctant attitude towards the task reflects his opinion that the instructions he has been given are less than clear. This interpretation is strengthened by Puck’s comment when Oberon rebukes him for squeezing the potion into the wrong eyes (Of thy misprision must perforce ensue / Some true love turn'd and not a false turn'd true (3.2.92-93)): it is hard not to take Robin’s words as less than enthusiastic and somewhat resentful when he says “I go, I go; look how I go, / Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow” (3.2.102-3). This interpretation of a sprite who is not too keen on being given tasks in impossibly vague terms becomes an additional source of comedy in the puppet adaptation where Puck, looking the part of a serious scientist, takes his time studying the equation, the graphic instructions of which even a preschool child would easily understand.

The pictographic instructions handed to Puck, are, in fact, more complex than they seem. The equation is not only a reference to Oberon’s desire for a magical love potion, of which he says “The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid / Will make or man or woman madly dote / Upon the next live creature that it sees” (2.1.176-78), but they also comment on the fairy king’s plans for using the potion to shame Titania into giving up the Indian child:

Having once this juice,
I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.
The next thing then she waking looks upon,
Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
On meddling monkey, or on busy ape,
She shall pursue it with the soul of love (2.1.183-89).

The ass’s head is, of course, not something either Oberon or Puck can have any notion about at the beginning of the play. Oberon only expresses his hope that Titania would lay her eyes on something horrible when she wakes up but does not mention an ass in his list of beasts, and Puck only comes up with the idea of changing Bottom and leading him to Titania’s bed when he accidentally encounters the mechanicals in the woods. The ass’s head, however, is one of the most iconic visual elements of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and similarly to the skull in *Hamlet*, it is almost of no significance where the given object appears in the dramaturgy of a performance; the very fact of its presence is enough to evoke the audience’s

recognition of the iconic image,²³⁰ which, as has been argued in previous chapters, can be a very effective tool of puppetry.

Puck places the whiteboard on an easel in the corner opposite his chair and walks over to the box standing on the table. He opens the box and reveals a mouse maze, designed as a forest with miniature trees lining the walls and forming a clearing in the center of the maze. He then takes out two mice from one of the cages and places them in the center of the maze. The mice brush noses, showing great interest in one another. They run around in small circles shoulder to shoulder, evidently excited, but their energy seems to wind down quite quickly and they lie down close to one another at two sides of a tree placed in the middle of the clearing. Puck nods as if seeing exactly what a scientist would expect to see from a control experiment. Now he prepares for the real investigation: he takes the remaining two mice and places them at the entrance of the maze. The two sniff each other, but one seems to show no interest in the other, turning and sniffing around in the air. Suddenly, as if catching scent of something, it takes off into the maze, the other closely following it. The two mice, although on different routes and moving ever slower as if losing their initial momentum, also end up in the center of the maze. Exhausted by the exercise, they too lie down close to the central tree. Puck nods knowingly again, then walks to the white board and looks at the equation, as if in confirmation. He takes a syringe with a red liquid from one of the shelves, looks back at the board, compares the syringe in his hand with the one on the board and nods again. Satisfied, he walks back to the maze, preparing to inject one of the mice. But as he looks down on the scene, all he sees is four identical white mice sleeping around a plastic tree. Evidently, two of them would need no love potion since they were already in love while in the other pair the attraction was not reciprocated and therefore Puck would need to inject the mouse that did not return its partner's affection. But which mouse was that one? And how is he to know one from the other when all of them look so alike to him? He stands there for a moment, scratching his head. He looks back at the equation, glances up at the place where Oberon's hand had delivered the order, then shrugs his shoulders and injects one of the mice at random. He then shakes the whole maze to wake the mice.

From this moment on the scene provides several permutations of mice chasing and running from one another, attempting to copulate, biting and scratching each other, with Puck injecting a random mouse from time to time, each time with a liquid of a different color and

²³⁰ The image of the skull is most often associated with Hamlet holding it in his hand (which, as has been explained earlier, is not actually referred to in the play), and even more importantly, the skull is as often featured in the "To be or not to be" (3.1.64) soliloquy as it is in its factual place in the gravedigger scene. *Exit*, for example, places the skull at the very beginning of the performance; it is the first object that appears on scene.

each time ensuing ever greater chaos. He evidently has no idea which mouse has received which potion with what result, and his panic grows visibly with every step taken in the dubious experiment. At the moment when Puck is confused to the point where he can only stare dumbly at the chaotic antics of the drugged mice, the majestic hand of Oberon appears again from above, demanding the potion. Puck looks from the maze, to the pile of syringes, to the hand, which makes a gesture of impatience. The would-be scientist shrugs and picks up a syringe at random, handing it to Oberon, whose hand disappears with the potion. Puck then takes the maze and dumps the whole experiment, with mice and all, into a plastic bag labeled 'biohazard', and sits back to read his newspaper.

One cannot claim that this puppet etude is an interpretation of the entire play, nor does it present the drama of each and every character. It takes some aspects of the play and formulates a visual representation of these aspects, emphasizing some points while obviously omitting others. Firstly, the scene highlights Puck's characteristic disinterest in the actual fate of the young people in the woods as well as his tendency to overlook those aspects of a problem he considers as 'minor details'. Andrew Stott in *Comedy: The New Critical Idiom* calls Puck "the counter-intuitive provider of solutions in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" and notes that he serves comedy by "turning sentiment into laughter". In the puppet scene Puck's solution of not solving the problem at all may seem unexpected, but in fact, nowhere in the play does he show genuine interest in the fate of the lovers. When Oberon reprimands Puck for the second time because now the two young men are about to kill one another over Helena, the sprite shows no signs of taking the matter any more seriously and says "Then will two at once woo one; / That must needs be sport alone; / And those things do best please me / That befall preposterously" (3.2.120-23). It is an additional source of humor (and irony) in the puppet adaptation, then, that Puck, the marionette, is entirely unaware of the fact that while he effectively plays god with the lives of a handful of laboratory mice and cares nothing about their ultimate fate, he himself is quite visibly controlled by a puppeteer.

Second, the scene emphasizes the loss of character the young lovers experience (even in traditional live stage adaptations the audience is often confused as to who is who and in love with whom), their interchangeability and their defenselessness in the face of manipulation. The random irrationality of the drama is both comic and tragic: as Mark William Roche explains in *Tragedy and Comedy*, "This blindness of love [...] may be said to evoke some of the wonder normally reserved for tragedy"²³¹ and this dual effect is one of the

²³¹ Roche 141. According to Roche this category includes *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. 327.

key elements that differentiate *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from other comedies of coincidence. When “love transcends the autonomy of the individual”,²³² as Roche writes, the resulting subconscious behavior of the people affected evokes laughter, pity and fear all at the same time, and it is exactly this twofold quality of the situation of the young lovers that the puppet scene emphasizes. Another element the antics of the lovers bring to the performance is one of the strongest tools of nonverbal comedy: the typical ‘chase scene’ of slapstick silent films. As Alan Dale writes in *Comedy Is A Man In Trouble*, “by far the most common structural device in slapstick is the chase. It is the ultimate kinetic expression of the hero’s being out of step”,²³³ and with the chaotic scurrying of the mice in the maze and Puck desperately trying and failing to catch up with his own runaway experiment, the puppet episode aims to reference this emblematic source of comedy.

Thirdly, the etude addresses the problem of the ending of the play, since *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a comedy the conclusion of which, although presenting multiple marriages and all-around jollity, is far from unequivocally satisfying for all parties involved. First of all, the effects of the night the four lovers had spent in the forest would surely not vanish without a trace and thus, their happiness would by no means be untainted. Although Demetrius would have us believe that “These things seem small and undistinguishable” (4.1.194), the night’s events had likely been more momentous than anything the young people had ever experienced before. Hermia faced betrayal by her love as well as by her best friend; Helena had to suffer rejection, then a sudden, unexplained surge of affection from two men and then a similarly sudden and unexplained reversal by one of them; Lysander is so dazed that he states “I cannot truly say how I came here” (4.1.154) and is lucky not to remember what he had done in the past hours; and Demetrius himself is destined to live not according to his heart’s desire but under the effect of a love potion. Even more problematically, Helena in turn, is destined to live with a man she had always truly loved but who would never have even considered her without a love potion. Can it truly be so satisfying to be “the next live creature” upon whom Demetrius “madly dote[s]”(2.1.177-78)?

It is not only the young lovers whose happiness is highly questionable. One of the marriages taking place at the end of the play is Hippolyta’s, to whom Theseus admits that “I woo’d thee with my sword, / And won thy love, doing thee injuries” (1.1.17-18). Egeus is clearly left unhappy, because although Theseus tells Hermia at the beginning of the play “To

²³² Roche 141.

²³³ Alan Dale. *Comedy Is A Man In Trouble: Slapstick In American Movies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. 7.

you your father should be as a god” (1.1.48), he is publicly shamed and denied his rights when Theseus tells him “Egeus, I will overbear your will” (4.1.186). Finally, Titania is humiliated by her husband into loving an ass (“Methought I was enamour'd of an ass” 4.1.78) and in her horror of seeing what she had done she cries “O, how mine eyes do loathe his visage now!” (4.1.81). A number of characters are thus left traumatized, hurt, ashamed or deprived of their consciousness and as such, the comic ending in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is ambiguous. It is this ambiguity that, although with its own unique tools of representation, the puppet scene aims to express with the ending it provides.

The scene presented above builds upon the already existing conventions of puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by portraying the different levels of the drama with different puppet techniques, as well as by playing with the inherent possibilities of having Puck physically manipulate the four lovers. It is, however, different from other existing adaptations in that here Puck himself is a puppet, and although a human animator is clearly responsible for all actions taking place on the stage, this animator is much rather a part of the mechanism making all actions possible than an omnipotent presence controlling everything. As long as the animation is technically flawless, the puppeteer can remain concealed even in full view (as explained in Chapters 2 and 3), while always serving as a quiet reminder of the irony of the controller being controlled. By meticulously solving all the technical difficulties of having a marionette manipulate puppets as well as objects of use, the performance allows for additional layers of interpretation in the intricate system of control and manipulation.

5.3. Richard III

While *A Midsummer Night's Dream* clearly already has its established practices of adaptation in the puppet theater, the hunchback Duke of Gloucester is a rare figure on the puppet stage. Although Susan Young²³⁴ indicates that there were occasional productions

²³⁴ Susan Young, in *Shakespeare manipulated: the use of dramatic works of Shakespeare in teatro di figura in Italy* (London: Associated University Presses, 1996) mentions but a handful of puppet adaptations between the 17th and 19th century of tragedies other than the five great tragedies, but of these we know almost nothing other than the year they were presented, since “Much of the early literature which dealt with the theater of marionette and burattini lacked scholarly rigor” 11. Even of one of the most notable puppet adaptations ever recorded, “the Colla/De Filippo *Tempest* which inaugurated the Venice Biennale and received a great deal of favorable response from the press” Young says it “has been mentioned only fleetingly in the literature” (13) and thus, we know next to nothing about the methods of adaptation, the tools of representation, the style of the puppets or the response of the audience. Of contemporary puppet adaptations of *Richard III* there is barely any information available; I myself have never seen or read descriptions of such a performance, nor have I spoken to any puppeteer who had first hand knowledge of such an adaptation.

between the 1660s and the beginning of the 20th century, today there is no description, critical analysis or account available of any such recent or contemporary adaptation. The apparent lack of puppet theater productions of the play is quite surprising if one considers the fact that *Richard III* fulfills many of the criteria that make tragedies more suitable for the puppet theater than comedies. The motifs of power, manipulation, inner conflicts and vivid imagery, which are always of great interest to puppetry, are just as dominant in this play as they are in Shakespeare's five great tragedies.

Recognizing *Richard III* as tragedy is a well-established practice in the critical literature. An example for this view is presented by Randall Martin in *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*, where he allows for the possibility of viewing the play as not only a history but also "as a self-contained tragedy focused on the titular character" because, as he explains, such an interpretation opens the perspectives for recognizing "the play's structural and rhetorical affinities with Greek and neo-Senecan tragedy, with Margaret, Elizabeth, and the Bosworth ghosts ritually invoking forces of nemesis and revenge, and Richmond acting as an agent of divine retribution".²³⁵ Another prominent example is to be found in *Tragedy and Philosophy*²³⁶ where the author points out that *Richard III* can be included into the corpus of Shakespearean tragedies because it corresponds to a number of important principles that make a play a tragedy. It satisfies many of the Aristotelian standards of tragedy by having a serious theme, a member of the highest society with a major character flaw as the protagonist, the hero (or in this case antihero) being destined for downfall and the play ending in death. We may add that Shakespeare also manages to evoke pity and fear in the viewer, albeit in this particular case instead of fearing *for* the hero we fear the hero *himself*. What exactly the *catharsis* felt by the audience will involve after witnessing the *peripeteia* of Gloucester is largely a question of direction and acting. It is just as possible to present Gloucester as a loathsome villain whose downfall comes as a relief, as it is to portray him as an enviably talented actor and politician for whom the audience feels deep sympathy regardless of the immorality of his actions. It is the latter version that makes the play tragic, and it is this mentality that can inspire interesting solutions on the puppet stage.

Certainly performing an uncut and untransformed version of the play may pose difficulties for the puppet theater, as it does in the case of nearly all Shakespearean pieces. Furthermore, the symbolic medium of puppetry may not be best suited for depicting the cruel

²³⁵ *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*. Ed. Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 338.

²³⁶ Walter A. Kaufmann. *Tragedy and Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. 271-276.

reality of the violent acts committed, nor would the fact that speech is but an accessory in the semiotic structure of the puppet stage help a production aiming to present the complex plot of a play with 38 named characters as well as an assortment of Ghosts, Lords, Gentlemen, Attendants, Priests, Scriveners, Pages, Bishops, Aldermen, Citizens, Soldiers, Messengers and Murderers. It may well be the scope of the play, its complex plotline or its graphic depictions of brutality that have kept puppeteers from producing their own versions, however, in the framework of our “Shakespeare etudes” these elements may be circumnavigated. What such a puppet etude can do is adapt part of the play by way of creative reduction, emendation, transformation and recontextualization, and thus produce a performance that will be an acknowledged and thereby recognizable interpretation of certain emblematic elements of the original. In the following then, I will provide an example for such a treatment of Shakespeare’s most sinister play.

The scene described here, like the one explained before in connection with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, is not based on a single passage from the text but rather on multiple segments that help portray the central features of a character or a conflict. This scene, however, is wider in its scope than the previously described etude: through translating various parts of the dramatic text to the language of design and movement it outlines if not the complete plot of the drama, but the entire span of a Machiavellian career. In this particular scene Szigeti and I tried to capture two basic motifs from *Richard III*: the protagonist’s immense capacity for adapting his strategy to the changing circumstances in order to gain power and his inability to cope with the power that eventually falls upon him.²³⁷

The scene opens with a low gloom, allowing the audience to glimpse the mere suggestion of what appears to be a gallows in the dimness. As the lights come up, it becomes clear that the tall structure dominating the stage is in fact a draw-well.²³⁸ Suspended from the short end of the lever of the draw-well are twelve shapes in white, dangling next to one

²³⁷ Michael Torrey in *The plain devil and dissembling looks: Ambivalent Physiognomy and Shakespeare’s Richard III* (in: *Richard III: Shakespeare Through the Ages*, ed. Harold Bloom, New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010) comments on Richard’s changes of strategy saying that “such deceptions frequently depend upon his ability either to nullify or to alter the signifying capacity of his body—his ability, as he himself puts it, to “clothe [his] naked villainy” (1.3.336) and to dress his deformity in flattering robes” 276. W. H. Auden in “*Richard III*,” from *Lectures on Shakespeare* (in: *Richard III: Shakespeare Through the Ages*) writes that “Richard always displays a consciousness of his ultimate goal as he is getting rid of his enemies” (228) but explains that “Richard is not ambitious in an ordinary sense. He’s not interested in becoming king for the position of power, but because becoming king is so difficult” 232. His ambition for the crown is similar to his ambition for wooing Lady Anne where, besides the fact that having her is a necessary step in becoming king, it is actually the joy of winning a game that is the driving force behind Richard’s actions. Auden says “When Anne succumbs, Richard exults not in the prospect of possessing her, but in having won her against such odds” 233.

²³⁸ Also known as a ‘sweep’ or a ‘pole-well’ the draw-well consists of a tall wooden A-frame and a pole serving as a lever, the long end of which holds a bucket suspended on a rope or chain, while the short end has a counterweight attached to it. Here the counterweight is provided by the hanging bodies.

another. These figures are almost formless, they may at first be mistaken for mere sacks or hanging bundles of rags. It is only on closer inspection that one realizes that the bundles have human shapes. These hanging figures represent the twelve people whose deaths Gloucester had caused or ordered: Prince Edward, King Henry VI, King Edward IV, Clarence, Lady Anne, Rivers, Gray, the two young princes, Hastings, Vaughan and Buckingham. The twelve people weigh down the short end of the pole completely and therefore the long end is high above the stage, well out of reach of a small, hunchbacked, crippled shape crouching under the structure. The pathetic creature is intently gazing upward, following the swaying motion of a shiny object suspended from the end of the shaft: the crown.

The character we see at the onset of the scene is based on the description provided by the protagonist himself at the opening of the play:

I, that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deformed, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them (1.1.16-23).

The misshapen creature tries to reach for the crown but quickly realizes that it is impossible for him to grasp it. He goes over to the other side where the bodies are hanging and tries to lift the end of the pole, but his efforts are completely fruitless. He evaluates the situation, calculates his options and decides on his course of action: he takes one body and slides it off the end of the pole. This causes the other end holding the crown to tip slightly lower. The rules are established: the only way to reach the crown is to dispose of the members of the royal family and eliminate the obstacle of the bodies obstructing Gloucester's way to the crown. He starts removing the strung up figures one by one, finding creative ways of dealing with each of them as the long end of the pole with the crown comes closer and the short end moves away. The crippled figure disposes of two bodies by clutching their faces and violently ripping the corpses off their tethers ("thy cousins smother'd in the Tower" 5.3.155); he skewers another with a sword and tosses it away like a piece of meat ("Think, how thou stab'dst me in my prime of youth" 5.3.125); he repeatedly stabs and spears one of his victims until it literally falls apart ("my anointed body / By thee was punched full of deadly holes" 5.3.132-33); he tenderly, almost lovingly embraces yet another, gently sliding it off the pole only to drop it carelessly on top of the other discarded corpses ("thy wife, that wretched Anne thy wife / That never slept a quiet hour with thee" 5.3.169-70). No two murders are the same

but each corpse invariably ends up on top of the growing heap at Gloucester's feet.

The gruesome violence of these actions is counterbalanced by the nonfigurative design of the corpses, none of them having a discernible character or a recognizable face; they are mere shadows of the human beings they once were. Compared to the carefully designed and well-developed character of the Gloucester-marionette these bodies are dolls rather than puppets; they serve as symbolic representations of the lives Gloucester had taken. The puppeteer performing the scene does not use these dolls as puppets, he does not give them life by giving them movement: for the puppeteer these bodies are props. There are moments, however, when Gloucester himself, by the act of killing, moves the bodies in a way that they become eerily animated for a brief moment, which serves as an additional source of stage tension in the puppet theater: the tension created by the duality of the "object with life".²³⁹

By definition, the inanimate object represents life on the stage when given movement. This effect, however, is generally achieved only if the intention of the movement is to animate the inanimate. Thus, simply dragging a puppet across the stage does not render it a performer, nor does employing an object of everyday use according to its utility make it a puppet. The line between prop and puppet, however, is thin and barely definable at times, and thus, there is always a liminal zone where the puppeteer may leave the audience in doubt whether a figure is actually to be taken as animate or not. This is a very strong tool in the hands of the puppet theater, and this is precisely what our adaptation plays with. If the bodies are puppets believed to have (or have had) life within the framework of the performance, the acts of violence may have a stronger effect but may also be perceived as uncharacteristically naturalistic in the symbolic world of puppetry. Conversely, if the bodies are mere props, the acts of brutality lose their significance. Richard's ambivalent relationship with the bodies, however, opens up the possibility for both interpretations, thereby strengthening the theatrical effect of the paradox of the living and the lifeless.

All through the scene the posture of the protagonist visibly changes with every act of violence, cold practicality or deceitful gentleness. As he goes on cutting down more and more people, he turns less pathetic, less crippled, more erect and elegant, his movements more dynamic. It becomes increasingly evident that the hunchbacked character of the opening scene was merely a role.²⁴⁰ After all, anyone who can successfully woo the mourning lady Ann to

²³⁹ Tillis 65.

²⁴⁰ Auden writes "In the beginning he is a hunchback with a strong physique for whom people feel either pity or fear—fear because his physical appearance must reflect his inner nature" (230) but notes that the changes in Richard's strategy are accompanied by the changes in the effect his appearance has on others. Michael Torrey very cleverly has an imaginary Richard ask the question, "What would a Vice (machiauel/usurping

become his wife after killing her husband is clearly a master of disguises and of playing roles. The role of the cripple is just as much an identity taken on consciously as are the parts of the lover, the king and the warrior. Having a deformity does not make one a cripple, nor does it render one helpless or weak, as is demonstrated by Richard's valor in battle. When the situation requires Gloucester to be a cripple who evokes sympathy, that is what he will be. But when it becomes necessary to 'straighten up' he will have no difficulty turning into the perfect royal heir. In the puppet scene, by the time he cuts down most of the bodies, he is completely upright and elegant, ready in his posture to take on the role of the king.

His efforts quickly yield considerable results: the more people he removes, the closer he gets to the crown. After a while, however, he finds that the two ends of the pole have come to an equilibrium, and while he still cannot reach the crown, neither can he reach the hanging bodies any longer. He then begins to stack the already removed corpses under the structure in order to get hold of the remaining ones. Eventually we see Gloucester standing on top of a pile of bodies, reaching for the last one to cut it down with a violent blow. As the last of the bodies falls, the pole slowly starts to tip, allowing the crown to move ever closer.

The scene thus far emphasizes one of the most obvious, and arguably, from the point of view of the theater, most important qualities of Gloucester: his ability to act (in both the literal and the theatrical sense of the word), to change his strategy as well as his character according to the requirement of any given situation. In the puppet theater it is possible to show this ability of adaptation as physical pliancy. This tendency of physical change is also apparent in the text: Richard acts the part of the lover, the king and the warrior not only in words, but to a surprising extent, also in his appearance, his gestures and his entire being. While he is always conscious of playing the given part and frequently talks with irony of the people he deceives, after wooing Lady Anne it is he himself that comments, not without some measure of surprise, on his own uncanny ability to put on appearances:

I do mistake my person all this while:
Upon my life, she finds, although I cannot,
Myself to be a marvellous proper man.
I'll be at charges for a looking-glass,
And entertain some score or two of tailors,
To study fashions to adorn my body (1.2.273-278)

actor/shameless sophist), if transplanted into a drama of political history, actually look like?" and answers, "He would be deformed, and his deformity would clearly signal his vicious nature." 275. This implies that showing himself to the world as a cripple may, in part, be a conscious decision of Richard's. While he may not be able to actually change his body, he "demonstrates that for the other characters in the play if not for the audience, he can refashion his deformity into a sign of anything" 279.

The other aspect of the play the scene aims to emphasize is Richard's inability to use his power as king. He shows amazing ingenuity in designing ways of disposing of the members of the royal family and his ambition and resourcefulness are admirable. When he achieves his goal, however, it becomes evident that he is not cut out for a king. It is interesting how, against all odds, he manages to grab the throne by playing the part of the lover, the villain, the friend, the mourning relative and the reluctant king-to-be, but when it comes to playing the role he had been preparing for all the while, that of the ruler of the realm, he is unable to perform. Richard is an excellent improviser, but it seems that he had no image in his mind of the kind of king he planned on becoming.

When all the corpses are cut and the crown begins to swing toward the ground, Gloucester scampers down the mound of corpses and positions himself on top of the well, just under the crown. He stands there, now completely erect, with no trace of any deformity, face turned up toward the arriving prize. But as the crown reaches his head it becomes evident that the crown is too big for Gloucester. In fact, it passes right around him and lands at his feet, fitting snugly on the rim of the well. As the crown settles on the well, the stone structure of the well becomes a face, eyes open on its surface and they look directly at the audience. The last picture we see before the lights go out is the figure of Richard, now looking down at the crown, standing on top of Richmond's crowned head.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter set out to propose a possible approach to creating a performance that, rather than attempting to stage a complete play, would aim at designing scenes based on those elements of Shakespeare's world of images where the tools of puppetry seem to offer original yet feasible solutions. I reflected upon the fact that both in my own work and in the repertory of Shakespearean adaptations to the puppet stage in general, tragedies take an overwhelming majority in numbers over comedies. As I pointed out, tragedies present more possibilities for the puppet theater than do comedies because (1) tragedy is an ideal ground for visual representation due to its highly figurative and metaphorical language (2) the emphasis in the text of comedies is on the dialogues which are often more literal (and thereby more difficult to present in images) than are monologues or soliloquies; (3) the dramatic tension caused by a central conflict affecting everyone or the presence of a hero or villain who controls or attempts to control every aspect of the story (generally features of tragedies rather than of comedies) is beneficial to the puppet stage because such forces can be translated to visual

signs; and (4) puppetry is particularly interested in the impossibly difficult choices tragic heroes or villains are faced with, since these conflicts lend opportunities for a visual interpretation of internal struggles.

I pointed out that although most Shakespearean comedies are only occasionally produced in the puppet theater, two comedies, *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are of particular interest to the puppet stage (and are frequently featured in the puppet theater) because they encompass certain motifs generally characteristic of tragedies. I then presented two scenes; one based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the other on *Richard III* and explained how the tools and methods of puppetry can be applied in creating nonverbal etudes constructed from elements of these two plays. As I explained, these two segments, together with the 'snake scene' taken from *Re:Hamlet*, serve as the basis for the new show, the still untitled project of a 'Shakespeare puppet-collage'.²⁴¹

In the final chapter I will move away from looking at puppet theater adaptations from the inside and take a bird's-eye view of the possibilities inherent in employing the tools of puppetry in the most popular medium for Shakespearean adaptations. As I aim to show, the methodology of the puppet theater has found its way not only onto the live stage, but also onto the silver screen.

²⁴¹ The performance is truly, as the title of the chapter suggests, adaptation in progress. While only two scenes, one from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and another from *Richard III*, were analyzed, etudes based on *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* are already in the making, and Szigeti and I are planning two additional scenes, one from *Macbeth* and another from *King Lear*. If the process of creating *Re:Hamlet* is any indication of the amount of time and energy required to produce such a performance, it will be at least an additional year before the production can enter the international scene and become one of the few examples of Shakespeare adaptations for the puppet stage available today.

Chapter 6. “See the Puppets Dallying” - the techniques of puppetry and film

Throughout this dissertation I have shown a number of different techniques puppetry may employ when adapting Shakespeare’s plays. I have talked about Noriyuky Sawa’s Bunraku, Nola Rae’s gloves, Michael Vogel’s grotesque mixed technique puppets and the marionettes of the Plovdiv State Puppet Theater and *Re:Hamlet*. As I aim to show in the present chapter, on the one hand, the choice of technique has a significant effect on the representational perspectives of a performance while, on the other hand, the choice of the play may also inspire a puppeteer to employ a certain technique rather than another. Each style of puppetry has the potential to emphasize one or another aspect of a given drama, while at the same time different plays require different technical solutions.

In the first part of this final chapter, then, I will recollect some of the techniques of puppetry I have talked about and emend them with ones that have been left out so far, in order to show how a given technique of puppetry may be especially suitable for presenting a certain Shakespearean theme. After offering a summary of the technical repertory of puppetry through its methods of staging Shakespeare’s plays, I will venture outside the strict context of Shakespearean adaptations for the puppet stage and show how the technical repertory of puppetry presented here has found its way into yet another genre: film. In Chapter 2, through the analysis of *És Rómeó és Júlia*, I provided a brief glimpse into the possibilities of the live stage employing some of the techniques of puppetry. Here I will show how Greenaway’s *Prospero’s Books*, a cinematic adaptation of *The Tempest*, makes use of not merely a select few, but virtually all of those tools and methods I have talked about throughout the dissertation. This analysis will reveal that although puppetry is an independent genre from all other performing media, it shares a surprisingly broad spectrum of its technical repertory with the cinema, significantly more so than it does with the live stage. I will also show that these shared tools of puppetry and film, in turn, hold unique possibilities for expressing the characteristically early modern transition from an organic-symbolic world view into a more mechanical picture of the world, where humankind is no longer watched over by the Creator but is placed in a clockwork universe, left by the Great Architect to run on its own.

6.1. Techniques and representation: the idiom of the puppet stage IV.

Let us first look at some of the most common techniques of puppetry and, through a number of Shakespearean adaptations recognize how the chosen style influences the

possibilities of interpretation. One way of categorizing styles and techniques of puppetry in relation to how they are able to stage those themes most central to Shakespearean plays is to look at the physical interaction of puppet and puppeteer. This aspect will prove useful because interestingly, the physical distance the puppeteer has from the puppet appears to have a direct correlation with the possibilities of expressing the feeling of vulnerability, the state of dependence or a desire of autonomy, fundamental themes of many Shakespearean plays.

Glove puppets (figures manipulated by inserting a hand into the puppet itself) are physically the closest to the player's body, and as a result, this type of puppet basically becomes part of the puppeteer's anatomy in performance. Whatever the actor does with her hand, the puppet will respond with the exact same amount of movement. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the direction and force of the action taken by the manipulator and the movement of the puppet, and in a Shakespearean adaptation this may be an interesting tool of representation for "fools of fortune, trencher-friends, time's flies, / Cap and knee slaves, vapours, and minute-jacks"²⁴², figures of no independence or mind of their own, characters with no individuality or ambition. At the same time, however, the direct physical contact may also limit the possibilities of presenting the glove puppet as, for example, having a desire for autonomy, and the simplicity of its anatomy does not allow for it to express complex emotions through movement and gestures. As I have shown in chapter 3, *Handlet* by Nola Rae, one of the most well known *Hamlet* adaptations, makes use of these qualities of the glove puppet by presenting a somewhat oversimplified, but highly expressive, condensed version.

The best moments of Rae's production (eg. the glove separating from the hand or the hand wringing water from the glove) are not only representative of what the technique of glove puppetry can do, but also provide a glimpse onto what it could have been capable of had the puppeteer been more open to exploring the possibilities in the tension between life and the lifeless. Rae makes good use of the possibilities in characterization through movement as each figure has a clearly distinguishable 'personality' suggested by the way each gloved hand walks, creeps, skips or hovers (as the ghost does) on (or above) the stage. Such distinctive manipulation and the use of simple colors to distinguish between protagonists would have easily allowed for ideas such as Hamlet mocking Laertes in their duel by copying his characteristic movements, or having a player in the mouse trap scene wear the color of Claudius or mimic his idiosyncrasies to indicate why Claudius, recognizing himself in the

²⁴² *Timon of Athens*, (3.6.100-101)

play, cannot continue watching the show. Glove puppets, simple as they are, allow for a vast array of solutions when adapting Shakespeare.

Hands-on tabletop puppetry (a technique where a figure is manipulated by one or more actors by holding onto its various body parts and moving them directly) is only slightly removed from the body of the actor, because although the figure is not ‘molded’ onto the manipulator’s hand like the glove puppet is, there is still direct physical contact between actor and puppet. Some tabletop puppets are manipulated by wires, sticks or dowels attached to the body and limbs, in order for the actors to be able to work in the background and thus, become less visible. Tabletop figures are a frequently applied technique in puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare today, as they are relatively simple to manipulate, but present numerous opportunities for characterization through movement. Tabletop puppetry is often combined with black-light theater, which renders the manipulators virtually invisible behind the puppets and allows for sudden changes in scenery. The puppeteer can simply insert a puppet or prop into the corridor of light to make it visible and move it out of the light again to create the illusion of the object suddenly disappearing. Adaptations such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by the Bristol Old Vic Theatre in Collaboration with South Africa’s Handspring Puppet Company (2014) or the same play in the Budapest Puppet Theater (2006), *Macbeth* by Australian Dream Puppets Company (2005) or *Romeo and Juliet* in the Harlekin Puppet Theater of Eger (2012) all use variations of the tabletop puppet. Tamás Somogyi, director of the Eger production created a black-light theater environment for the puppets where the unexpected changes of the surroundings express the protagonists’ vulnerability to external forces, while the constant presence of the manipulators’ faces in the background enforces the point that their own decisions and actions are also the result of manipulation and coercion. The combination of the tabletop puppet and black-light theater, thus, proves a useful tool for emphasizing external unpredictability and internal insecurity present in the play.

A more abstract form of tabletop puppetry, object animation, is also a popular tool in many Shakespearean adaptations. The basic principle of the technique is that any inanimate object, even a tin can or a shoe, may become a puppet if the puppeteer animates it by giving it movement and thereby giving it life (or rather the illusion of life, as explained in Chapters 2 and 3) and character. In 2001 Pál Lengyel, late director of the Puppet Theater of Eger, produced *Twelfth-Night* in the Puppet Theater of Győr with nothing but glassware: tumblers, cups, bottles, pitchers and jars were used as object puppets. The protagonists were fragile glasses: rotund goblets, slim champagne-glasses, tall snifters and handsome chalices. The character roles were ‘played’ by bottles and pitchers. Malvolio, for example, was a

transparent flask with small objects hanging from its neck, and Sir Toby Belch a corpulent beer mug. The production also applied another substance besides glass: colorful fluids were flowing from one glass into another. The color of the fluid, the action of glasses pouring liquid into one another, the liquid overflowing or glasses and bottles being empty or full all represented the characters' emotional state.

Rod puppets are, again, another step farther from the actor. These are figures generally manipulated by a single puppeteer from below with the aid of rods attached to the limbs. Rod puppets are also often featured in Shakespearean adaptations, for example in Danish puppeteer Finn Rye's *Romeo and Juliet* or in *Playing Shakespeare* by the Romanian Tandarica Puppet Theater. While glove puppets are essentially unaffected by physical factors outside the body of the actor, the farther the puppet is from the manipulator, the more independence it will have from its controller. This fact gains importance in Shakespearean adaptations because the question whether a character is forced into a situation or makes his or her own conscious decision may be expressed through the very technique used in an adaptation: while a glove puppet strictly obeys its operator, a rod puppet or a marionette will always have some uncontrollable and therefore unpredictable movement of its own due to inertia or the momentum of the body of the puppet. By the time we come, through tabletop and rod puppets, to marionettes, inertia will become an often aggravating but also inspiring feature of manipulation and a strong tool of representation.

String marionettes, of which I have talked extensively in the previous two chapters, represent the far end of the scale in terms of distance between animator and animated figure. The slightly erratic movement of the marionette conveys the feeling of unpredictability while its similarity to the human actor and its physical distance from the manipulating hand may effectively create the illusion that the puppet can truly become independent from its animator. The *Hamlet* adaptation of the Plovdiv State Puppet Theater, for example, operates precisely with these qualities, as does the scene based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* discussed in the previous chapter.

Basing a taxonomy of puppet techniques on this distance, a generally accepted method of classification in the world of puppetry,²⁴³ however, is only one of the possibilities at hand. I propose another approach to looking at the relationship of puppet and manipulator, one that

²⁴³ Similar classification of techniques is to be found in: Bell, John. *Strings, hands, shadows: a modern puppet history*. Detroit, MI: Detroit Institute of Arts, 2000; Currell, David. *The complete book of puppet theatre*. Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987; Francis, Penny. *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; Tillis, Steve. *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet*. London: Greenwood Press, 1992.

examines the way a puppet is given life and character by the person or persons behind/under/above it. Whether it is a single actor manipulating one or more figures or a group of actors cooperating in the animation of a single character makes a significant difference in the possibilities of interpretation. An interesting example for the play on characterization by employing multiple puppet masters was provided in Chapter 2 through the analysis of *A Plague O'Both Your Houses!!!* by Divadlo Drak.

Drak's interpretation of the drama as the story of two powerless, manipulated children whose identity and personality is secondary to their roles in a predestined story is somewhat at odds with the possibilities inherent in traditional European techniques, such as glove puppets, rod puppets or string marionettes, which are generally animated/manipulated by a single actor. Because in these techniques there is a one-to-one correspondence between puppet and puppeteer and each figure obtains its personality and its intentions from its one and only animator, personality is largely inviolable and characters are usually not interchangeable. As I explained, in Japanese traditions individual acting and characterization are less important than the perfect harmony of manipulation performed by a group of puppeteers, and therefore Bunraku seems to fit perfectly with the interpretation of a performance that raises the fundamental questions of loss of personality and the delicate quality of character.

A Midsummer Night's Dream by the Bristol Old Vic Theatre in collaboration with South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company (2014) also plays with the possibility of a group of actors animating a single figure. They, however, take the idea one step further and create the figure of Puck from different objects, each one manipulated by one or more actors, and like a portrait by Archimboldo (with faces and figures created from fruits, vegetables or books), the character only takes shape when these objects are animated by the group in perfect unison. Puck is an ever-changing, indefinable entity, a shape shifter, with the objects constantly rearranging themselves within his body.

6.2. Puppetry and film

The tools and methods of puppetry discussed thus far (emphasizing the double nature of the puppet as object and living at the same time; separating the puppet and the animator and thereby reflecting on the metatheatricality of the genre; representing a character with an actor as well as a puppet; having the unanimated puppet represent death; giving a visual representation of multiple and transposable intentions and personalities; etc.) firmly set it apart from all other performing media. Puppetry is not only unlike the live theater because of

the essential difference between the nature of the actor and that of the puppet (cf. chapter 2), but also because even the shared basic semiotic features of the live stage and puppetry gain different emphases in each respective medium (cf. chapter 3). Interestingly, however, film is a performing medium that seems to share as many properties with puppetry as it does with the dramatic stage and as such, it provides wonderful ground for observing the workings of puppetry outside its usual context.

To a puppeteer, a film such as Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* is an excellent ground for investigating the similarities between the potential in puppetry and film in the context of Shakespearean adaptations. This adaptation makes use of numerous techniques either directly borrowed from the puppet theater or employed by the world of puppetry and cinema alike, but few of which are, or indeed can be, shared by the live stage. As I have claimed in the introduction of this chapter, *Prospero's Books* employs tools borrowed from nearly all of the styles of puppetry I have listed above: it builds upon the characteristic properties of glove puppetry, the possibilities inherent in object animation, the features of string marionettes and the attributes of Bunraku, and even evokes the technique of *leporcello* (a type of book the pages of which fold out into three-dimensional formations) and paper-animation. Interestingly, it does all this without featuring a single puppet.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the play serving as a basis for the film, holds an extraordinary treasure for the puppet stage: the presence of a master manipulator. The puppet theatre can express this presence by simply employing one of its numerous styles where the manipulator is visible on stage, which in today's puppet theater can be virtually any technique. While traditionally the puppeteer may have been at least partly concealed when working with marionettes, tabletop puppets or rod puppets, today even the puppeteer playing with glove puppets may be visible to the audience and therefore the possibilities of revealing the master manipulator are endless. Greenaway's film expands upon the theme of manipulation in a number of ways, many of which are very characteristic of certain styles of puppetry.

The first hint that suggests to the viewer that he is entering a world of puppets is when, at the very beginning of the film, Prospero opens a book to reveal the crew of the ship carrying the current elite of the dukedom of Milan. The characters appearing on the pages of the book first seem to be mere paper cutouts, but become solid characters when the pages fold out into three-dimensional structures and turn into actual buildings and landmarks. In a similar manner, we are entering the world of object animation when a toy ship, bouncing about in a pool becomes a real ship struggling to keep afloat in a storm. As in puppetry, it is

the combined imagination of the animator (Prospero in this case) and the spectator that makes the representation of a ship become the real thing in the world of Greenaway's film.

Paper theater and object animation are very consciously employed in Greenaway's visual world, but these are not the only examples of the tools of puppetry at work. The first time Ariel appears, he is a small child sitting in a swing. The next time we see him he is a young man hanging on long ropes attached to his limbs, as if controlled by an invisible puppet master. Later Ariel will appear in four different forms and the motif of hanging on strings and being manipulated from above return over and over again, up until the moment when Prospero sets the faithful sprite free, whereby the strings disappear. Less obvious than the clear allusion to the subservience of the string puppet, the film also works with techniques of manipulation resonating with scenes I have described in connection with the style of Japanese Bunraku. Ariel is a puppet in Prospero's hands, but he also becomes puppet master when all the players of the drama are finally brought together on the island. As the character of Ariel is represented by four different actors in Greenaway's film, when his four alteregos lead the semi-conscious Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian, Gonzalo, Trinculo, Stephano, Ferdinand and Miranda onto a kind of stage, the scene provides all the possible permutations of one or more Ariels moving a single or multiple figures. Not only are the four Ariels completely interchangeable and indivisible at this point, but the notion of character also becomes ambiguous in the ranks of the seemingly cataleptic crew and court.

Another obvious parallel with puppetry is provided by the fact that Prospero is not only a manipulator but also a player in his own drama. After he inflicts the storm upon the unwitting crew, he does not remain an outside force but physically enters the leprello world he himself has created. From this moment on, he is both puppet and manipulator, and this duality is reminiscent of the way characters are doubled in the Bulgarian marionette production of *Hamlet* examined earlier. The two Prosperos, one observing and controlling all, as if by invisible strings, the other playing and physically manipulating some from inside the performance, as if by treating the other characters like mere objects in his hands, are at times present simultaneously. One is always the live actor, the human manipulator, while the other is seen by all as merely one of the figures on the stage. There is a strong sense of duality in the entire film where Prospero is both the conductor and soloist of his own symphony, just as Shakespeare himself is the protagonist of his own piece. In Greenaway's film, however, Prospero is not only a playwright and actor but also an omniscient narrator. The screen makes it possible to present numerous layers of communication simultaneously, something Greenaway does with great expertise. His film has three authors (Shakespeare, Greenaway

and Prospero); two directors (Greenaway and Prospero); two protagonists (the author-narrator-outsider Prospero and the acting-participating Prospero); and two narrators (Prospero and the camera). This might almost seem as if Greenaway were carrying things a bit too far, but in fact he is not. For there is a controlling force that puts everything in its place, a tool that allows Prospero to dominate the chaos of mixed identities and schizophrenic characters, and which conveys the message that a single mind towers over all others. This tool is one that the live stage is not in possession of, but which works just as well on the screen as it does in the puppet theater: the *common voice*.

Film, just like the puppet theater, is capable of granting the voice of one character to another or amplifying inner soliloquies without having to revert to ventriloquism. Thus, when in *Prospero's Books* the shipwrecked Ferdinand, Miranda or Ariel speak in the voice of Prospero, they echo the sounds of an external force, a superior spirit. This is one of the most ancient tricks in the puppet theater, employed mostly in glove puppetry where the actor or actors are traditionally hidden: the transposition of voices. This trick is made possible by one of the basic characteristics of the semiotics of the puppet. As I explained in Chapter 3, although the three basic signs of design, movement and speech are also the fundamental constituents of the live theater, the sign of speech is *not inherent* to the puppet. Puppets have no voice of their own, and even though in a performance the audience will willfully accept, as a convention of the genre, that the words are spoken by the puppet rather than by the actor manipulating it, it is evident that speech does not come from the puppet. In Greenaway's film, the characters become puppets in this sense, because it is always in Prospero's voice that they speak, and it is extremely expressive when Ariel, Miranda and the other players do manage to find their own voice in the end.

Greenaway's Prospero is a great manipulator, but he lacks the understanding of one of the basic principles of puppetry. Although puppets have no power of their own and need an outside force from which to gain life, these inanimate objects are not fully subservient to their master. Each puppet has a distinctive personality owing to its design and technical repertory, and all puppets will refuse intentions that are opposed to this distinctive personality. Puppets are not *free* to become anything and everything but *have the potential* to become what they were *designed* to become in the hands of a manipulator. Prospero achieves all he had planned: the shipwrecked courtiers are in his power, Caliban's conspiracy has been revealed, and Miranda and Ferdinand have found each other. But the manipulator has treated his puppets not as *objects with life*, but as mere toys. In the moment of his master's assumed triumph, Ariel, who has been ordered to perform actions fundamentally alien to his nature, not only

finds his voice but also the strength to confront Prospero. He literally holds up a mirror to Prospero, in which the great magician can see that what he had done is far from magical. He faces Alonzo's pain mourning his supposedly dead son, Ferdinand's broken dignity, Caliban's, Trinculo's and Stephano's humiliation. In Ariel's mirror Prospero's actions seem distorted and cruel, yet Prospero recognizes the truth of what he sees.

Realizing the weakening power of his master, Ariel, the puppet cuts away his own strings, an old trick employed by marionette players centuries before the advent of motion pictures. Still, the trick has an astounding effect whenever it is used. The secret lies in violating the very rules that we ourselves have laid down. When a performance begins, be it in the live theater, on film or on the puppet stage, in its very first moments the creators and the audience of the show reach an unspoken agreement concerning the rules that will apply to the following few hours. Under the terms of this agreement, actors will abandon the conventions of the outside world. In return, spectators will also leave their everyday sense of reality in the cloakroom until the end of the show. Without conventions, however, the audience is completely lost, so as soon as the lights are out and the curtain rises, each spectator will easily abandon most of their prior assumptions in order to gain some footing and understand the laws that govern the given performance. One will quickly accept, for example, that all the characters of a film are using the same voice, just as in a puppet performance one will accept that puppets speak without moving their lips. The audience is fighting tooth and nail for something that can be understood as a rule within the given reality and gratefully latch on to anything that seems to present an acceptable internal logic for the performance. If the performance wantonly violates the very rules that govern it, the director runs the risk of confusing the audience. If, however, this violation serves the better understanding of the given interpretation, breaking the conventions can become a powerful artistic tool, as it does in Nola Rae's *Handlet* when glove and hand are unexpectedly separated, each coming to represent something new.

In the puppet theater we are shocked when a puppet that has been speaking in the voice of a certain actor suddenly starts to utter words in a different voice. When it happens in Greenaway's film, our reaction is the same. It is also a thrilling sensation to see a puppet freeing itself from the manipulator and becoming independent. It might cross one's mind that this is technically impossible, but this is not what makes the phenomenon magical. It is magical rather because it contradicts one's image of the given reality and violates the rules entirely accepted by the audience. In a very similar manner, Ariel ignores the order of a world defined by Prospero's laws when he speaks in his own voice. Prospero loses control and has

to realize that shaping the events of the island is not his one-man game any more. This game has other players as well, and the director suddenly finds himself in the audience astonished at the fact that rules, his own rules, are violable.

The moment the players find their own voices the puppet show seems to be over. Or rather, the puppets are left without a master, but the puppet stage does not disintegrate, nor do the figures realize that they are still within a set designed by Prospero. At the beginning of the film the camera enters the world of a puppet stage and Greenaway leaves us within this world even when no one is moving the figures any more. Prospero, the manipulator, relinquishes his power and thereby reunites with Prospero, the player: he puts on the formal wear of the Duke of Milan and becomes merely one of the characters of the show once and for all. But what kind of puppet theater can exist without a manipulator? One would suppose that after the events of the drama all will be well: the young couple will live happily ever after; the wicked will repent and the Duke will become a better ruler of his realm. Everything will be as it has to be; no further thought or influence is needed to complete the story. The sometimes erratic, stubborn, even rebellious puppets of the island may now become a different breed of animated figures: the predictable automatons of a mechanical theater, insignificant cogs in a clockwork universe, left to run on its own.

6.3. Conclusion

This chapter aimed at showing how the tools of puppetry may be applied in one of the puppet theater's closest sister arts, the cinema, and how the shared metaphors employed by the two genres can become relevant in expressing some of the central problems of an early modern world view. I pointed out a number of obvious similarities between the technical possibilities of the two genres by first providing an example of each technique of puppetry and then showing how these techniques are utilized in Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*. As it was demonstrated, this cinematic adaptation makes use of a near complete technical repertory of the puppet theater without using actual puppets, and is therefore representative of the intermediality of the two genres. As it was shown throughout this dissertation, not only can puppetry create its own interpretations of Shakespeare's works, but it can also enhance the possibilities of staging in the live theater and enrich the technical repertory of the cinema, as well.

Conclusion – Puppeteering Shakespeare

I started this dissertation with the observation that although puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare are relatively scarce, the relevance of examining such adaptations is provided by, on the one hand, the growing emphasis on the mediality of representation in today's critical universe and, on the other hand, the critical acclaim these performances almost invariably receive. The fact that Shakespeare's plays can function remarkably well in a medium not primarily based on speech, but rather on design and movement, has provided the basis for an examination of why this should be so. Thus, the principal aim of my dissertation was to show how the puppet theater is able to present Shakespeare, and in doing so, I aimed to explain how a critical and interpretive perspective of the live theater – puppet theater, and film – puppet theater interaction can not only shed light on the logic of representation upon which the opportunities of Shakespearean puppetry are based, but it can also make an important contribution to the understanding of the Shakespearean canon and the extraordinary survival capacity of these dramatic texts.

I proceeded with the analysis in six chapters, each providing a different aspect of the theoretical background and the practical questions of Shakespearean adaptations on the puppet stage. Firstly, in Chapter 1 I defined and contextualized the term most frequently used in the dissertation: *adaptation*. I began the investigation by establishing how and why, in the context of a puppet theater performance of a Shakespearean play, the word *adaptation* is and should be used as opposed to a number of other available terms. It was shown that there is no other term that can refer to both a *process* (as involving reduction and emendation and transformation and recontextualization, all used in a creative way to produce a work of art) and a *product* (as an acknowledged, and thereby recognizable interpretation of the original). In explaining the *process of adaptation* in the specific context of staging Shakespeare in the puppet theater I argued that when undertaking such an adaptation, we must (1) look for and find those elements of the drama which make it relevant for our time and social environment and which can lead us to a new direction for presenting the play; (2) define and follow this newfound direction which differs but also stems from the traditions that take us back to the "original" and its origins, in order to produce a creative interpretation of the play; and (3) in following this direction transform, reduce and emend the play, within the limits of recognizability, to render it suitable for the medium of the puppet theater. Based on these three steps three questions serving as a framework for the process of adaptation were formulated. Thus, the questions to be answered by a director working on an adaptation of

Shakespeare for the puppet stage, and consequently, the questions serving as the backbone of this dissertation are were? (1) WHY ('why is such an adaptation justifiable and relevant'); (2) WHAT ('what is the new direction the specific adaptation will take') and; (3) HOW ('how will the puppet stage lend new relevance and actuality to the text and how will the play be suited for the puppet stage in light of the potential horizons of expectations of the audience').

In order to later be able to answer the above questions, in Chapter 2 I provided some essential points of reference for the semiotics of the puppet theater. I first set out to explain the basic differences as well as similarities between the live theater and the puppet stage in order to, on the one hand, establish puppetry as an independent medium with its own rules and methods of representation and, on the other hand, demonstrate how the tools and methodology of puppetry can prove productive in the specific case of adaptations of Shakespeare's plays to the puppet stage. As was shown through the analysis of two productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, one on the live stage and the other on the puppet stage, the puppet theater has a variety of methods with which it can present a Shakespearean play, and which strongly set it apart from the traditions of live theater. As I explained, however, despite the innate differences between the two genres some live theater productions have recently started to borrow and learn from the tools of puppetry, as demonstrated by a number of mixed genre performances created by directors of the puppet theater as well as the live stage. Today there are examples of the live stage applying recognizable techniques of puppetry, and the success of performances employing the now shared tools of the two media provides a further insight into the ways in which puppetry and Shakespeare may be brought together to produce a successful adaptation.

Chapter 3 analyzed the practicability and relevance as well as the tools and methodology of three puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In answer to the first question proposed in Chapter 1 (i.e. why new adaptations may be justifiable and relevant, and more specifically, whether presenting *Hamlet* without its text is a viable approach to staging an adaptation), it was explained that puppetry, owing to its unique methods of communication and especially to its ability to express complex notions without the use of speech, is capable of providing a medium for an interpretation based on the 'phenomenon of *Hamlet*' rather than on the dramatic text. As was argued, the play has been separated from the text itself, and thus consists not only of its written form, but also of all of those cultural connotations and images that we associate with the drama, as well as of our experiences of past performances and readings of the play. In discussing the specific adaptations I pointed out that while Nola Rae's *Handlet* uses many of the well-established formulae of puppetry to

produce a condensed version of the plot of *Hamlet* rather than reflecting on the characters or the nature of their conflicts; and the Bulgarian production, while showing possible interpretations of situations, mainly emphasizes the absurdity of the play; *Exit* manages to effectively build an adaptation on the previously established ‘complex phenomenon of *Hamlet*’ in a largely nonverbal performance, using the tools and methods of puppetry.

While in Chapters 2 and 3, due to the obvious limitations of information about the *process of adaptation* in the specific instances, the focus of attention was on *adaptation as a product*, in Chapter 4 I extended the argument to incorporate the *process* element into the examination of a non-verbal, string marionette adaptation of *Hamlet*. In answering the second question formulated in Chapter 1 (i.e. *what* the direction of the adaptation will be) I addressed the challenge of the text, the issue of technique and the practices of design and movement in *Re:Hamlet*. The challenges of dealing with the text were considered based on the observation that the puppet theater can translate verbal metaphors to visual signs, and is better suited to present a play with the use of images and movement than with the use of the spoken text. In discussing the issue of technique, it was explained that owing to the unique way the string marionette creates the illusion of the object with life it is, among all types of puppets, the most recognizable metaphor for the human being. As such, the marionette it is an appropriate instrument for expressing some of the most fundamental themes of Shakespearean plays, such as power struggles, manipulation or being the victim of unavoidable circumstances.

In answering the third question proposed at the beginning of the dissertation (i.e. *how* puppetry can lend new relevance and actuality to the text and how the play may be suited for the puppet stage), I analyzed the specific methods of staging in *Re:Hamlet*. Three scenes from the performance were shown as examples of the way the puppet theater can stage covert motifs of the drama, translate verbal metaphors and allegories to visual signs and emphasize the inner conflicts of the characters with the use of images and action. While it was argued that translating the play to the nonverbal sign system of puppetry is a practicable approach to staging Shakespeare, I also pointed out that there may be problems with the method when none of the text is used.

After the treatment of the possibilities as well as the specific difficulties of staging Shakespeare in the puppet theater, Chapter 5 concentrated on those elements of the plays that seem to lend themselves most readily to the tools of puppetry. I proposed a possible approach to creating a performance that, rather than attempting to stage a complete play, would aim at designing scenes based on those elements of Shakespeare’s world of images where the tools of puppetry offer original yet feasible solutions. Because the chapter presented possible

staging techniques for both comic and tragic scenes, I proposed several possible explanations as to why tragedies take an overwhelming majority in numbers over comedies in the repertory of Shakespearean adaptations to the puppet stage. As was explained, a number of elements inherent in tragedies, rather than in comedies, allow for a visual representation, some of these elements being the highly figurative and metaphorical language of tragedies; the dramatic tension of tragedies caused by a central character or conflict affecting everyone; and the impossibly difficult internal struggles of tragic heroes or villains.

In the final chapter I moved away from the practical questions of puppet adaptations and broadened the focus of my investigation to show how the tools of puppetry may be applied not only on the live stage (as explained in Chapter 2) and on the puppet stage (as discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5), but also in one of the puppet theater's closest sister arts, the cinema. I highlighted a number of important parallels between the two genres by first providing an example of each technique of puppetry and then showing how *Prospero's Books*, a cinematic adaptation of *The Tempest* employs these techniques. The investigation of the tools of puppetry outside their usual context serves to demonstrate that this performing medium, while creating its own interpretations of Shakespeare's plays, can also inspire other genres to employ the specific tools of the puppet theater in their Shakespearean adaptations.

As proposed in the introduction, I have taken advantage of my position as a puppeteer to show, throughout this dissertation, how practical implications of creating an adaptation may shed new light on the possibilities of Shakespearean representation and to reflect upon the ways in which practical experience may contribute to the critical discourse. I have done so through establishing an extended definition of adaptation based on the specific requirements of the adapting medium; explaining the fundamental difference between the semiotic properties of the puppet and the actor and, in doing so, demonstrating the basic properties of the semiotics of the medium of the puppet theater in order to show what sets it apart from the live stage; identifying a set of tools and methods that originate from the puppet theater but which are now also employed on the live stage in adaptations of Shakespeare; providing an understanding of the differences in the properties of Shakespearean tragedies and comedies in view of the tools of representation of puppetry; describing specific ways in which the puppet theater employs its semiotic, aesthetic and dramaturgic characteristics in Shakespearean adaptations; and consistently presenting a perspective in which puppet theater adaptations of Shakespeare may be viewed as part of the canon of Shakespearean representations.

In addition to my aim of expanding the possibilities of the investigation of Shakespearean representation, I also proposed to offer a reference for the practice of creating

Shakespearean adaptations for the puppet stage. This I have done by providing an insight into the process of a number of adaptations and suggesting guidelines for a procedure for staging, based on a theoretical framework of adaptation studies and semiotics. I proposed, specifically, that the success of a puppet theater adaptation of Shakespeare primarily based on design and movement will depend on the creators' willingness to follow through with the steps of adaptation (as described in Chapter 1); their resolve to build the performance on a firm understanding of the basic tools of puppetry (as explained in Chapter 2); on their ingenuity in finding the subtext behind the text by recognizing the "original" itself as an intertextual combination of traditions and inventions (as argued in Chapter 3) and; on their ability to effectively apply the method of translating the dramatic material into the nonverbal idiom of the puppet stage (as proposed in Chapters 4 and 5).

Every play presents new problems and each instance of analyzing or creating an adaptation offers new perspectives. It seems that while an investigation based on the dual viewpoint of theorist and practitioner can provide valuable insight into the principles and practices of the medium, no simple answers are to be found where the representational perspectives and limitations of staging Shakespeare in the puppet theater are concerned. Yet, whether aiming to establish a theoretical context or propose a practical framework, one would like to believe that understanding the problem is at least half way toward devising a solution. The words of Vincentio, the Duke of Vienna, in *Measure for Measure* seem reassuring enough: "all difficulties are but easy / when they are known" (4.2.222-23).

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Appendix I: Performances discussed

- 2000 *The Tempest* (Budapest Puppet Theater, Hungary)
- 2001 *Romeo and Juliet* (Divadlo Drak, Czech Republic)
- 2001 *Hamlet* (Kolibri Theater, Hungary)
- 2001 *Hamlet* (Figurentheater Wilde&Vogel, Germany)
- 2001 *Hamlet* (State Puppet Theater of Plovdiv, Bulgaria)
- 2002 *Twelfth Night* (Vaskakas Puppet Theater, Hungary)
- 2003 *Macbeth* (Márkus Theater, Hungary)
- 2004 *The Comedy of Errors* (California Shakespeare Theater, USA)
- 2004 *King Lear* (Atlantis Company, Hungary)
- 2004 *Macbeth* (Puppet Theater of Grodno, Belarus)
- 2006 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Budapest Puppet Theater, Hungary)
- 2008 *As You Like It* (Marionettentheater Dagmar Horstmann, Germany)
- 2009 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Kolibri Theater, Hungary)
- 2010 *Othello* (Stúdió-K, Hungary)
- 2011 *Romeo and Juliet* (Tandarica Theater, Rumania)
- 2011 *Hamlet* (Bence Sarkadi, Hungary)
- 2012 *Romeo and Juliet* (Compañía Albero Teatro, Spain)
- 2012 *Romeo and Juliet* (Harlekin Puppet Theater, Hungary)
- 2013 *Romeo and Juliet* (Teatro Esquina Latina, Colombia)
- 2014 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Bristol Old Vic and Handspring Puppet Company, United Kingdom)
- 2014 *Macbeth* (The Little Angel Theatre, United Kingdom)
- 2014 *The Tempest* (The Little Angel Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, United Kingdom)

Appendix II: Illustrations

1991 Prospero's Books (film, Peter Greenaway)



2000 *The Tempest* (Budapest Puppet Theater, Hungary)



2001 *Romeo and Juliet* (Divadlo Drak, Czech Republic)



2001 *Hamlet* (Figurentheater Wilde&Vogel, Germany)



2001 *Hamlet* (State Puppet Theater of Plovdiv, Bulgaria)



2006 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Budapest Puppet Theater, Hungary)



2009 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Kolibri Theater, Hungary)



2011 *Romeo and Juliet* (Tandarica Theater, Rumania)



2011 *Hamlet* (Bence Sarkadi, Hungary)



2012 *Romeo and Juliet* (Harlekin Puppet Theater, Hungary)



2014 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Handspring Puppet Company, United Kingdom)



2014 *Macbeth* (The Little Angel Theatre, United Kingdom)



2014 *The Tempest* (The Little Angel Theatre and the RSC, United Kingdom)

